

Al. No-16

A YEAR OF MY LIFE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

FARMER'S GLORY
~~STRAWBERRY~~ ROAN
THE ENDLESS FURROW
THE GENTLEMAN OF THE PARTY
COUNTRY DAYS
HEDGE-TRIMMINGS
THINKING ALOUD
FARMING, HOW TO BEGIN
LAND EVERLASTING
COUNTRY CALENDAR
MOONRAKING
FARMING ENGLAND
ALREADY WALKS TO-MORROW
HITLER'S WHISTLE

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A YEAR OF MY LIFE

by

A. G STREET



SERVICES



EDITION

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Preface

TO THE THIRD EDITION

This book contains the reflections of one Wiltshire farmer during the last of the pre-war years. As such it is a faithful record of things seen and foreseen.

March 1942

A. G. STREET

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AUTUMN

I

I LIKE September. Of course, every month in the year brings its special joys and pleasures, and, as a countryman, I should hate to miss any of them; but somehow, either for work or play, I like September rather better than any of his companions.

He is such a satisfying fellow, in that he seems to cater for everybody. Summer has not yet said good-bye, although, with an occasional morning frost, winter has already waved his greeting from a distance. In fact, September's weather is just right for everybody. It is neither too hot nor too cold. The sun still shines brightly, but there is an invigorating tang of freshness in the air, which makes one want to do something, and not to doze in the shade as one did in June.

And what a choice of things to do September offers! Anything and everything which is seasonal in either winter or summer. Bathing can still be enjoyed, and both sea and river water are warmer now than they were in high summer. Cricket and tennis are still gaily with us, and football has made a start. One can fish, or ride, or shoot; for both trout and grayling are still feeding on flies, and cub-hunting and partridge-shooting have just arrived. The blackberries are ripe, the hazel-nuts almost ready to slip from their greeny-brown sheaths, and after a storm of rain mushrooms spring up all over the place.

So much for the pleasure side of September in the country. In the matter of work he shows a similar generosity, giving permission for either the winter or the summer variety to be performed. For September is a busy month. He winds up one farming year and begins the next. He gathers in the fag end of one harvest, and sees the preparations for next harvest begun. One can reap the late barley, and sow the winter oats. In fact, during September one can obey every direction of the old song—one can plough and sow, and reap and mow, and be a farmer's boy, all in the space of thirty golden days. Lovely!

Such were my thoughts during a lazy ride this morning. September is perhaps the best month in the year in which to ride, drive, or walk through the country-side. The finish of harvest has laid many fields bare for inspection; the clearness of the air enables one to see such

a long way; and as one travels slowly through the rural film one discovers the various parts of the complicated mechanism of country life working steadily, each in its special niche.

I noticed that last especially this morning. As I was riding along one of the many green ox-droves in downland, I saw four pigeons fly up from a stubble field and circle for a moment or two. Then, they made their way towards a small clump of trees, which sheltered a pond. Of course, I thought: Grain is dryish grub this hot weather, and they are going for a drink. Now if some one has thought to hide himself in those trees to-day, he would get some shooting. Presently the four birds settled in the trees. Then I heard "Bang! Bang!" and only two birds flew away. It was evident that one part of the rural machinery was working satisfactorily.

The time was eleven-fifteen, so I stopped for a few moments on a hill-top, to survey the country-side below me. It was all gilded with September sunshine, and everywhere its machinery was on the move. I saw tractors and horse teams slowly widening the straight brown strips in the yellow stubble. I noted a combine-harvester busy in a field of late barley. The rich hum of a threshing-machine floated up from the valley. A line of figures walking through some roots a mile away wrote the words partridge-shooting in my mind. The notes of the "Lambeth Walk" came quite clearly from the whistle of a lad driving a horse-rake. I could both see and hear a hedge-trimmer sharpening his hook. I caught a flash of the huntsman's pink coat as he led his hounds back to the kennels from cub-hunting.

In one field a potato digger was at work. In another a dairyman was toddling a heifer and her newly born calf downhill towards the buildings. In the corner of yet another a thatcher was busy on the side of a rick putting on last year's straw to cover this year's grain. Definitely September's country-side was a very lovely place, in which everything and everybody was high busy. At least, so I thought, until I passed along by a flock of grass lambs, every one of which was lying at ease in the shade of some tall trees. They had evidently been sensible enough to fill their bellies in the early morning when the dew was on the grass. Now the sun had made it dry and harsh to their mouths. Yet they had never been taught such wisdom, save by that old method of trial and error, which even in these days is hard to beat.

And so is September. At least that is the conclusion I came to as a result of my ride this morning. I mentioned at the beginning of this note that I liked September. Well, that statement will bear repetition. I now place it on record that I like September very much.

II

The increasing shortage of farm labour is driving farming in this country ever more rapidly into those branches of agriculture which require the least amount of man-power per acre. For instance, unless the inventor can produce machinery to sow, single, hoe, and harvest sugar beet satisfactorily, it looks as though the acreage of this crop will steadily lessen in the future.

This trouble is not one which can be cured completely by farm wages being raised to the town level: for, money rewards apart, monotonous and laborious manual work of all kinds has become very distasteful to the modern generation. I am not blaming them for this attitude, but merely state it as a factor in the agricultural problem. In spite of the increasing use of machinery farm work means a lot of hard manual work which cannot be dodged. In consequence, in the future people will have to be bribed more and more heavily before they will do it, which looks as though the townsman may find his food costing him more and yet be unable to put the blame on either tariff or subsidy. For instance, if he wants fresh milk daily, he will have to be prepared to make it worth while for some of his fellow countrymen to work seven days a week.

Apparently this increasing distaste for farm employment is not confined to this country. A friend has just written me that in Canada the unemployed refused to go hay-making this summer; and recently I read a short story in an American magazine of an ex-convict, who, after several years in the penitentiary, did some hay-making on an American farm. The poor fellow had decided to go straight, but after two days in the hayfield he decided that crime, even with the certainty of penal servitude as a reward, was a far, far better thing. The publication of that story shows which way the wind is blowing with regard to agricultural employment in U.S.A.

Of course, even in that country the older generation still revere hard manual work, and scorn the attitude of modern youth towards it; but they are fighting a losing battle. Here is how an old American farmer once described to me the difference between his own and his grandchildren's attitude to work.

"When I was a boy we used to work sixteen hours a day all the week," he said. "On Sundays we used to get up at five o'clock and

milk the cows. Have breakfast, wash, change into our Sunday black, walk four miles to church, and there stand up and sing, 'Work for the night is coming.'

"Now, my grandchildren don't work more'n four hours a day, an' that blame slow time. And on the few Sundays when they do go to church, they drive to it in a motor-car, and there a hired choir stands up and sings for 'em, 'Art thou weary, art thou languid?'

"And they are. Yes, sir. You betcha!"

III

Apparently the recent caddling weather has hindered the combine more than the binder. Before going to Wilton Fair I got up early this morning and went cub-hunting, to discover a big field of wheat, dead ripe and sickle-eared, waiting for weather which would enable the combine to get going, and on my way home I saw a stripper busy in a field of barley.

It is, I think, asking rather a lot of the British climate to expect it to stay fine until October. I have no wish to see such harvesting again, for it was a miserable job.

The spot this morning reminded me of a conversation with a New Zealander yesterday afternoon. He had been spending a holiday travelling about England, and had called on me to discuss farming problems, so very soon we were hard at it trying to put the world straight. On one point in connection with farming we found ourselves in complete agreement. This was that the kind of farming which resulted in the ruination of the land was a crime, sometimes individual, and in these days in far too many cases national.

"Go on hammering away," he said, "at the point that land is the only permanent national asset, and that farming it should be considered a sacred trust."

Apparently from his account there seem to be few countries to-day in which thousands of acres of once good farming land do not show signs of bad farming, even of shameful neglect. It seems queer that the cleverer man becomes the less respect he seems to pay to Mother Earth.

But I must admit that I was very surprised at his main criticism of English farming, which was that our farmers seem to employ far

too many men per hundred acres. He had been looking round Norfolk, he told me, and considered that the farm labour there could well be cut by fifty per cent. When everybody and every paper in this country is bemoaning the lessening number of people employed on the land, this was certainly a change.

I imagine that the average visitor from the Dominions looks upon farming purely as a business, and has little or no conception of how it is mixed up with our social life. It always seems to me that our land must first supply the needs of all sorts of people before farming comes into the argument at all. There is the man who wants to hunt, shoot, or fish, and who owns or rents land with those things primarily in view. There is the retired townsman who buys land mainly in order to secure the so keenly desired social position. There is, of course, the much vexed question of tithe, now certainly taken out of the hands of the Church; and, last, but certainly not least, there is the provision of a free playground for our huge town population. It is when all these are satisfied and not before that we do manage to run a farming industry which still holds the proud position of being the stock farm for the agriculture of the whole world.

I mentioned something of this to my new friend, and immediately he became very scornful of the sportsman's requirements from land, and more especially so concerning hunting. So, in all fairness to that class of folk in this country, I had to point out that the great majority of them did pay for their footing in the country-side. In addition I mentioned that I was going cub-hunting this morning. He rather reluctantly admitted that perhaps he had misjudged the sporting fraternity in thinking that they were nothing but enemies to farming, and then we drifted off to other topics. But as he was leaving he besought me to give up hunting, saying that no man of sense would waste his time in such a foolish manner.

I just grinned, and let him go. He was a good sort, and I had learned much from his conversation, but I have long given up arguing about hunting with people who have never hunted. That is also a waste of time.

But that phrase "waste of time" stuck in my mind, and was there this morning. In September sunshine we were bustling cubs from one double-hedgerow to another, and my old police horse was giving every evidence that carrying my sixteen stone over down turf was a much better job than carrying a lighter weight on police duty. She felt, and I think, looked as though she was enjoying herself. So evidently must I have done, for during a check our cheery hunt secretary remarked as

much, saying that it did him good to see my happy fat face. I admitted that I was enjoying myself, and added, "It's no good. I shall have to sell this mare. She's so comfortable that I shall waste far too much time with you this winter." "What of it?" he retorted. "You'll probably live twenty years longer, and so be easily able to make it up."

With such authority in support I'm afraid that I shall continue to waste time as long as I am able, even if doing so debars me from being considered a man of sense.

Incidentally, cub-hunting needs rain as badly as farming. Not only is the ground hard, much too hard for riding, but once the morning mist has been licked up by the sun that mysterious thing, scent, seems to be almost non-existent. Still, this autumn sport does get me and many others out of bed a deal earlier than our wont, which is no doubt very good for us. Besides, the man or woman who does not reckon the game of cub-hunting well worth the candle of early rising is hard to please, for September England in the morning is cheap at any price.

The trials and tribulations of the man who is hunting hounds at all seasons are supposed to grant him licence to relieve his feelings by giving tongue to all sorts of expressions. Many which I have heard recently are, I fear, unprintable, but the other day a friend gave me an interesting history of "Tally Ho." He said it was to all intents and purposes pure Arabic, and was brought back to England by the returning Crusaders way back in the thirteenth century. I cannot help wondering whether any Arab has taken to the East some of the modern expressions from our hunting-field, which, I repeat, are not fit for publication.

IV

How true it is that "Drought never bred dearth in England." I write that because, even though I much prefer a far wetter season than this one, I am conscious that the harvest generally has been better than any one could have expected last May, and that all classes of farm live stock have done well this summer, and are in a healthy condition to face the coming winter. A Surrey farming friend told me the other day that he had not got one blade of green grass on his farm, but that he was amazed how well a bunch of in-calf heifers

were doing on a bare pasture. According to him they had had no grub for months, but were hog-fat. And then he gave the real reason for this marvel. "Of course, I've a good water-supply."

Talking of water-supplies and cattle reminds me of two tales of far-west Canada. The first deals with the disastrous drought conditions which have ruled there during recent years. A townsman getting off the train in Saskatchewan noticed a farmer hauling water from the river, and inquired how far he had to haul it to his farm.

"Three miles, I guess."

"Well, why don't you drill a well?"

"Because I'd have to go the same distance," came the reply.

But, even though that may not have been an exaggeration, the townsman was talking better farming than the farmer. No man ever yet hauled enough drinking water for milking cows—it just cannot be done—and I should doubt whether any other class of stock ever received an adequate supply by this method.

The second story is of an older vintage, and refers to the time when the railway first went through the ranch country of Western Canada. At that date the railway was unfenced; and, in consequence, many cattle were killed by the trains. Naturally the bulk of the claims were always for valuable cows which were heavy in calf, on the grounds that these were unable to get out of the way of the trains. But this business soon became so expensive that the company sent a representative out west to meet a committee of ranchers and fix up a proper price schedule.

The meeting went off amicably enough, both parties agreeing a list of prices for every class of beast. This done the representative of the railway inquired whether they should not fix a price for horses which might be killed. "Hell, no," said the ranchers' chairman, "any horse that can't move fast enough to keep in front of a blame train deserves to be killed."

Such was the scorn of the old-time westerner for the iron horse of steam. To-day, he drives a forty h.p. motor-car in most reckless fashion. I ought to know, for I have ridden with him, on impossible roads and with my feet pressed almost continuously on an imaginary brake.

V

The other day I came across a good illustration of the truth of that remark that the country-side runs more smoothly when undisturbed

by the alien visitor. I was driving a town friend across South Wiltshire, and suddenly pulled up the car for no apparent reason.

"What's up?" he asked. "She's running all right."

"They're driving partridges over there," I answered, and pointed to a line of white flags moving slowly over the hill-side, and to the half-hidden figures of the guns behind a hedge on the other side of the road. Then I besought him to light his pipe while we watched the finish of the drive, pointing out that if we went on we should spoil sport by turning the birds away from the guns, but that by staying where we were we should be helping as a flanker to the line of beaters.

To my utter amazement he argued that as we were on a public highway we had the right to continue our journey. This flummoxed me completely, so I had to content myself with pointing out that our stopping or going was a question of manners, and that rights did not come into it at all. And the more I think about it the more convinced I become that without the give and take of good manners the intricate machine of England's rural life could not run suently really for as long as twenty-four hours.

VI

I cannot seem to get away from this rabbit question. If I stay in the country nearly every farmer I meet has something to say about it, nine out of every ten agreeing that rabbits are a pest and not an asset; and recently during my visits to town I have found politicians, scientists, and all sorts of people just as interested as farmers in the rabbit problem, again ninety per cent. of them agreeing that our present rabbit population is a menace to good farming.

Yesterday evening I had a decidedly rabbit conversation in my own home, and I spent two hours this morning rabbiting hard in London. Then, feeling rather tired of rabbits, I sought sactuary of my club for lunch, only to find that the *plat du jour* was boiled rabbit. This was too much. A farmer does not travel a hundred miles away from home in order to eat rabbit for lunch. So I became a traitor to British farming, and ate lobster in protest. Which just proves once again that the palate beats patriotism every time. Indeed, I am prepared to hazard a small bet that at any public lunch or dinner where the company is composed of British farmers, at least seventy-five per

cent. of them, if given the choice, will choose gorgonzola in preference to English cheddar. Anyway, I should have to plead guilty.

VII

To witness any incident is, I think, always better than the story of it which one obtains at second hand. While out with the hounds early this morning something occurred which was so amusing that it tempts me to break a rule and to tell tales on one of my neighbours. He is a local parson, whom most people would perhaps describe as a mild little man, but he is also one for whom I have a profound respect, the reason being that he does his job. For some reason or other we had a mile hack along the road to the first draw, during which the hero of this tale, wishing to discuss something with the Master, rode close behind hounds and in front of the field.

All went well until the huntsman led his hounds towards two slip-rails which were blocking the road into the covert. He slipped the top one, his horse hopped over the other, hounds followed, then the whip, and next, of course, the Master, leaving the clerical gentleman sandwiched between a rail nearly three feet high and an eager field, most of whom were female and under twenty. Jumping anything, both for him and his mount, had been a thing of the past for many years, but for the honour of his cloth the parson decided to have a go.

He shook his fat cob into a trot towards the rail, surprising that sedate animal so much that it kept going, and somehow got the rails all mixed up with its legs. Fortunately they, I mean the rails not the cob's legs, were rotten, and broke into several pieces, so no harm was done either to horse or rider. Of course, all this happened in a flash. One moment there was a jump, but at the time the Church had reasoned with it there was just nothing save one or two short pieces of stick lying on the ground. It was obvious that many of the thrusting ladies behind were very disappointed, but I give the padre full marks for the way in which he carried off a rather humiliating situation.

He looked round at the field in dismay, and said, "I say, I'm most awfully sorry, but, after all, it is in my own parish."

Which, in my opinion, was definitely one up to the Church. Hang it all! If a vicar cannot break a rail in his own parish with impunity, who in England can do so?

VIII

Recently the gliding enthusiasts have been using some of the highest of the Wiltshire downs as a jumping-off place, so to speak. A few weeks ago I witnessed this new sport on the Dunstable downs, and I was amazed at the way the pilots can manage their powerless kites. They seemed to be able to stay up in the air as long as they pleased, and to drift with the wind or tack against it as they willed.

Having watched several gliders catapulted into the air from the top of the ridge, I drove down into the valley in order to watch their manœuvres from below. There, as I gazed upwards, I saw a kestrel in the sky about half-way between me and the human bird. Apart from the difference in size, their shapes and movements were identical. Each flopped and side-flopped and hovered, and drifted in similar fashion.

I wonder what it feels like to be up aloft in a glider, emulating the birds; and I wonder still more what it feels like when one is waiting to be catapulted into space? For I shall never know. I have not the nerve to find out, but I am very willing to take my hat off to the young folk who do possess it, and also to their parents who permit children to play such a dangerous game.

However, there is one feature of this new sport of gliding which to me is very attractive—it is noiseless. For which relief much thanks, for the majority of the crazes of modern youth are anything but.

IX

A new story is hard to come by, and for all I know, although this one came new to me the other day, it may be as old as the hills. One night a villager who was stealing some fowls was disturbed by the village policeman. He dropped his plunder, and bolted; but the bobby, who was evidently a runner, captured the thief in the churchyard.

"Now then," he said, "what be you doin' here?"

"That bain't vair," replied the culprit. "You should ask zum o' they wot bin yer longer'n I 'ave."

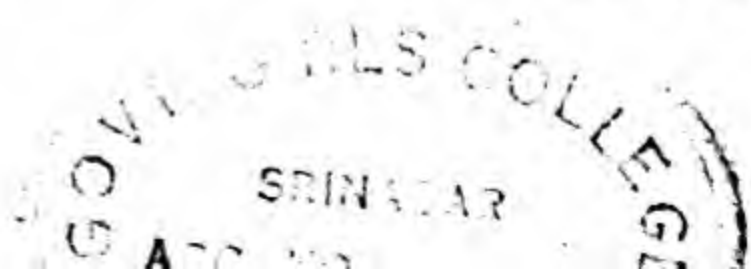
X

The other day I spent a pleasant wet hour or two at a local hunt horse-show and gymkhana, during which a friend told me that this year there were two hop-picking machines at work, one in Worcestershire and one in Kent; and from his account both doing their job with some success. When I inquired the capacity of such a machine he informed me that it could do the work of three hundred hop-pickers!

And so the world progresses. Too quickly for most of us in one direction, and far too slowly for all of us in another. We continue to discover ways of increasing production and decreasing hand labour, but up to date we seem to have failed lamentably in the necessary corollary of discovering how to distribute and consume the resultant plenty.

But even though our farming is in the van of mechanized progress there is still a few things remaining in connection with it which have changed very little, if at all. The other morning we were cub-hunting and a farmer friend who will never see sixty again walked across to one of his coverts in order to see how we were getting on. There he found—it was an awkward bank of covert—the huntsman inside on foot and a lady rider holding his horse; so, of course, he relieved her of the responsibility. Suddenly it dawned on him that he was standing on a wet, sloshy pasture holding a horse which was saddled and bridled. He had not been on a horse for at least a dozen years, but the feel of the morning and the sound of horn and hound proved too much for him. In less than no time, he found himself with a horse between his knees once again.

I and I think everybody present were hoping fervently that hounds would get away on a hot scent, for then we knew he would be galloping away like John Gilpin and leaving the huntsman to curse; but unfortunately the covert was blank, and a quarter of an hour later found him on foot once more. But here is the charming sequel. Next morning he received a letter from the Master, informing him that next time hounds met at his farm there would be a horse provided for him. That's England, that was. That's England, that is. And, in spite of hop-picking machines and many other clever contrivances of chains and cog-wheels, that will be England, that will; and I hope for a long, long time to come.



XI

A day with the partridges has enabled me to shoot indifferently well and to enjoy the autumnal rural scene to my heart's content. Of course, one can do too much of the latter, with the result that a covey sometimes catches one napping. One moment the whole world is at peace, and the next brings a whirr of wings, bang! bang! and far too often nothing to show for either noise save vain regrets. I am told that the driven grouse is the more difficult bird to hit, but I will confess that the Wiltshire partridge presents me with more than enough difficulties, especially when he is coming with the wind under his tail and a nasty swerve in his flight.

It is the sudden nature of his advent which flummoxes me, and the fact that generally one does not see him coming until he is on top of one's butt. I can deal with him more efficiently when he comes over fairly well up than when he skims the hurdle and tries to take my hat off. In the latter case to yield to the temptation to take one bird in front results either in complete miss or a carcass which has been mangled at a range of only a few yards; and I have yet to learn the art of taking, by two well-directed stern chasers, a right and left from a crowd of rapidly receding brown dots. Still, sometimes a bird does fly into my shot, and this, together with good company, the sight of the orderly English scene, and the crisp feel of an autumn day is good enough for me.

XII

The other day a newly made friend informed me that he looked upon me with very mixed feelings; the reason being that while he considered most of me an asset to British agriculture, he was bound to describe the remaining portion as one of that hardly pressed industry's greatest liabilities. "You're ninety-five per cent. right," he said, "but the other five per cent. makes you Farming's Public Enemy Number One."

This was all very good fun; so, when he apologized for such criticism, I could not help telling him that I considered it a compliment; pointing out that no one could be expected to attain one hundred per

cent. standard of correctness, and that in most examinations such a percentage of marks as that which he had given me warranted an honours degree. To which he agreed, and afterwards we wrangled very happily, agreeing to differ violently concerning this distasteful five per cent. This, of course, is my outspoken appreciation of British farming's most valuable crop, grass.

But, bad as that may be, I do not think it quite justified the title which he tacked on to it. British agriculture is far too big a thing to be worried very much by such a small proportion as one of its tenant farmers. Also, it has everything to gain and nothing to lose by publicity of all kinds, even perhaps of its weakness. To my mind nothing is to be achieved by a hush-hush policy, and the best defence in argument is usually to admit any weak points before the other side can make capital out of them.

But I must confess that in spite of my pride in being considered ninety-five per cent. correct in my views concerning agricultural policy, I do not like the title of Farming's Public Enemy Number One; the more especially as for my sins I am repeatedly finding myself championing farming's cause in public. Only the other day I was pleading the cause of the country-side before an audience of people in one of our largest cities in the Midlands. Rightly or wrongly I tried to prove to them that the townsfolk of Britain possessed great treasure in the country-side, and on that count that they should give it a little of their heart also.

That sounds a trifle mercenary, perhaps, but in this materialistic age it seemed to me to be a sound approach. The fact that for every £100 which the rest of the British Empire spends in this country our home farmers spend £80 was evidently news to the greater part of my audience. It was queer that the majority of townsfolk never realize the potentialities of a prosperous country-side as a customer for the products of the towns; especially as no man is such a free spender as the British farmer when he has some money to spend, and, indeed, often when he has not.

XIII

Townsfolk are not the only people who obtain sport and pleasure from the country-side; occasionally even the farmer enjoys a little of it. The other day I spent a glorious morning helping some friends and

the water-keeper to drag the river. In a hot summer day this provides great fun. One gets wet, and possibly a trifle dirty. Invariably that one step too far is taken in the stream, which means that one's gum boots are soon filled with water. When one is wearing short gum boots this is just a happening which brings ribald laughter from one's companions, but the sight of the keeper wading in a deep hole in waders up to his arm-pits and where the water reached to within an inch of the top of them caused me furiously to think. Had he taken that extra step, his waders would have filled, and how we should have saved him from drowning I don't quite know.

However, all went well, and the nets produced a grand showing of trout, which were carefully and immediately returned to the river, and a goodly haul of coarse fish, chiefly roach and dace. Pike, that morning, were missing, which speaks well for the keeper of that stream, but I well remember seeing a boy badly bitten some years ago by a pike which had been out on the bank for several minutes. Granted, one couldn't blame the fish, but it was a nasty business.

Later on that day we did all sorts of things. With infinite patience we caught several carp in a lake by means of the attractive bait of honey paste. A pleasing game on a hot afternoon. Just bait your hook, cast out into the water, trig the rod with its reel uppermost, and thereafter sit and smoke until the unexpected happens. Which always does happen just like that—when you have gone indoors to tea, or strayed away from the bank for a change of scene. Suddenly you hear the reel racing, run madly down to the lake-side, grab the rod, and then have a good quarter of an hour's fun before a ten-pound carp comes tired to the landing-net. On light dry fly tackle such a fish takes a deal of landing.

Then after tea we proceeded to blow up some roots in the park near by with a most ingenious method, the tools for which one of the party had brought in his car. As a result of doing some of the necessary boring with the huge auger I have now a nasty red sore between the thumb and finger of my right hand. A pest of typewriter work which leads to nimble fingers but soft hands. It was a glorious day.

XIV

For several years now the boys at my old school, Dauntsey, have been experimenting with wild rabbits, in order to try to find out just

what their presence means on a farm. The report of these experiments has just come to hand, and is entitled "The Wild Rabbit and its Importance in British Agriculture." Well, to-day no one can deny that the rabbit is not important in our farming, and the majority of British farmers would, I think, qualify that by saying that the rabbit was either damnably or devilishly important.

As grass is our most important crop and also the one which suffers the most from the depredations of the rabbit pest it was well worth while to make this experiment on grassland, and to attempt to find out not only the amount of herbage which rabbits consume, but also the effect of their occupation on the botanical composition of the sward. I have not space here to give the full results of the latter but two things stand out. Firstly, that, owing to rabbits, moss increased from 0 per cent. to 33 per cent., and that the clovers were reduced by half. So much for the effect of the rabbits' occupation of the land. What did they eat while they were achieving this disastrous result? This experiment shows that twenty rabbits, when introduced on to an acre of pasture in February, will, together with their offspring, eat 73 per cent. of the herbage grown in the succeeding four months.

Now, if that be true, no one can question the importance of the wild rabbit in our farming, and few people, I imagine, will suggest that rabbits are more important as a selling product of the farm than as enemies to farming. Possibly the rabbit population on farms is not so high as twenty to the acre in February, but there must have been many acres of our farming land which carried a stock of five rabbits to the acre last February. On that basis the farmers of that land have lost nearly 20 per cent. of the stock-carrying capacity of holding this summer, with a corresponding reduction in the grazing value of their pastures next year. There are, I know, some farms in this land on which it would pay to farm rabbits, but the great majority of them are very definitely not of this character, and that those who farm them cannot afford to have their stock-capacity reduced to such an extent by rabbits.

I mention this rabbit experiment here because, owing to my well-known hatred of rabbits, a gentleman has recently written to me saying that he suspects me of being one of those people who do not like rabbits on the dining-table. I can assure him that he is mistaken. I am very fond of rabbits on my table, either stewed, roasted, or fried in batter; but I loathe and detest rabbits on my farm. Without this recent proof I have long considered such rabbits too expensive for my pocket, and I would welcome the day when I had not one rabbit on my farm.

Under such happy conditions I would gladly and should gladly pay any rabbit farmer a half-crown for one of his products for my own eating. Then, if my household consumed one rabbit weekly throughout the year, my rabbits would cost me £6 10s. per annum. I dare not try to estimate what my rabbits have cost me during the past year or two.

XV

One stable thing in to-day's world of uncertainty is the land. No matter what clever foolishness man contrives, land remains stable, waiting ready to reward him with its bounty according to his efforts to serve it. Civilization progresses—just now, with all these rumours of war, one must question that—actual farming methods change, each year sees new inventions pressed into its service, only the land remains unaltered.

Even the annual celebration at the finish of harvest has changed tremendously during the last few years. I have farmer friends who, instead of the old-time harvest supper, now take their employees for a jollification either to the seaside or to town. By all accounts thirty or forty Wessex farm-workers made their presence felt on a fashionable beach, for I heard of one such gathering which arrived by charabanc, from which they proceeded to extract not only themselves but their provender for the day. This included amongst other things a barrel of beer, which they manhandled from the esplanade down on to the sands, horsed it up tenderly, and tapped it. This, apparently, worried the beach inspector, who suggested to the culprits that such conduct was against all regulations, and that they "couldn't do that there 'ere." But rural Wessex takes little notice either of people in uniform or of town regulations. Even so, as the inspector was obviously trying to do his job according to instructions, the sinners condescended to reason with him.

"'Gainst the rules, be it?" remarked their spokesman. "Well, look at yer. Zee thic veller awver there? 'Ee've jist took a bottle o' beer outen 'is basket.' Be you gwaine to stop 'ee?"

"No," answered the inspector, "you see——"

"We doan't zee nothin', me bwoy. 'Tis thee as 'ave got to zee.

This be the way o' it. This veller 'ave brought 'is bottle o' beer on to the zands, which, zeemingly, you 'lows 'ee've got a puffed right for to do. Well," slapping the barrel affectionately, "we've a brought our li'l bottle, a 'ooden one, which we'm gwaine for to drink, an', wot's moor, take away the empty all tidy like. Zo you cain't do nothin' at all about it zave to 'ave a glass friendly like. Walt, draw the gennleman a glass o' ale."

Being a wise man, the inspector drank their health and left them to it, presumably having realized that the solution to his problem just required a proper sense of proportion. But even he would have been amused at the remark of one of the ancients of the party, who, when he descended from the charabanc and viewed the sea for the first time in his life, gazed round the bay and exclaimed, "Maister, I niver thought as 'ow the zea wur as big as thickey. Why, there's yacres an' yacres o' it."

On another occasion, as a substitute for the harvest supper in the big barn, this same farmer took his employees and their wives by charabanc to a huge motor works, and then to a performance at a London music-hall. When I asked one of the party just why they had chosen to visit a motor works, he said, "Well, we be allus drivin' the machines they do make up there. Thee's know, eether cars, lorries, or tractors. We grow the townsfolk's grub, zo we 'lowed as 't'd be a good plan to zee 'ow they made our tools."

As nine out of every ten farm-workers must now be skilled mechanics and chauffeurs of sorts, this seemed to be a sound reason for the trip, so I inquired further particulars. Apparently they had milked the cows at home at four a.m., and then the whole village, men, lads, wives, and sweethearts, had set out, leaving only the local inn-keeper at home to give the poultry a necessary feed in their absence. The tractor factory interested them tremendously, but the general opinion was that they would not care to work in such a place, the reason being that to work every day in the same setting would be so dull by comparison with farm work. Other criticisms were that most of the factory workers had pasty faces, and that smoking during work was forbidden.

The music-hall show pleased everybody save one old hand, who, after getting seated in the stalls informed everybody in a loud voice that "'twur a zight too 'ot." He then proceeded to take off his coat, waistcoat, and collar; and, when a companion suggested that such things were not done and that people would look at him, he said scorn-

fully, "Let 'em. I've a zeed a zight o' vaces to-day that I ain't niver zeed avore, an' I doan't care fur any ov 'em. Do the main on 'em good to look at I."

The party arrived back on the farm at midnight, whereupon the men and lads proceeded to milk some two hundred anxious cows—of course, by machinery and with the aid of electric light.

One can regret this change in farming customs, in the same way that one is apt to regret so many of the changes in our farming practice which have taken place during recent years; but once again it does illustrate that farming tries to keep pace with the times. Besides, regrets do not get anyone anywhere, and in this instance the point to be considered is the wishes of the farm-workers. There is no doubt in my mind that every one of them prefers the exciting new fashion in harvest celebrations to the old-time supper in the barn.

Of course, the real reason why jollifications to celebrate the finish of harvest are now few and far between, is because, owing to the increased use of machinery, man-power in farming has been reduced tremendously. To-day few farms employ sufficient people to muster an adequate gathering in the barn for a Harvest Supper, but yesterday I came across what seemed to me to be an admirable way of meeting the times in this matter. I was invited to a Harvest Supper, new style, by the High Wycombe Branch of the National Farmers' Union. Thanks to the good work of its officials, a company of landlords, farmers, and farm-workers, some two hundred and fifty strong, sat down to supper in the village hall at Tyler's Green.

We had a merry evening. We sang the "Farmer's Boy" and many other songs. Some of us for our sins were condemned to make speeches, but such was the courtesy of the audience that nothing was thrown at any of us. One remark in the patter of a country song brought great applause. The singer was relating how he took his wife to the Dairy Show, and during the tale he said, "Ye zee, my wold 'ooman bain't like thease yer Ministers o' Agriculture. When she do zay zummat, she do mean it, an' it happens."

Even a Minister of Agriculture would have appreciated the jest, and would have agreed that it was a good crack for such an audience. But I will readily admit that it is given to few politicians, and certainly to no Minister of Agriculture, to be so definite in their statements as is the average married man's "Wold 'ooman." Moreover, now that so many of the smaller Harvest Suppers have faded out, it would seem that many other branches of the N.F.U. might well copy the example of High Wycombe.

XVI

For many years now I have been convinced that the British nation owes much of its past success in the art of government to the fact that the majority of its rulers had the advantage of a rural upbringing. Indeed, I go so far as to say that it is only since the practice of that art has slipped into the hands of townfolk that such a mess has been made of it. And surely the present state of things in world politics justifies that last remark? However, I have just come across a rural story which seems to illustrate, not only that the countryman possesses a keen sense of humour, but also that he must, perforce, learn the art of governing his fellows, a much more difficult proposition than governing people whom the ruler does not know and rarely sees.

A farmer friend of mine had some poultry running around his field buildings, and had for some time been rather disappointed in their egg yield. One evening, chancing to go round to the back door of the carter's cottage for a jug of hot water in which to mix a horse drench, he noticed far too many egg-shells lying about for his peace of mind.

But the carter was a good carter, and it was in the middle of the farming year, so he decided to say nothing but to shift the poultry down to the safer haven of the home buildings.

A few days afterwards the carter, who had heard the news, said to him, "I do yer as you be gwaine to shift the poultry."

"Yes, carter. They don't lay very well up here, and they make such a mess in the cart-shed."

"I zee. But 'tis a pity. I do like to yer thic cock a crowin' in marnin'."

"Oh, well, said the farmer, "we'll leave him up here."

And so he did.

XVII

I never remember farmers as a class being quite so disgruntled with the political treatment meted out to their industry as they are at the present time. Granted, farmers have always grumbled, and will

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always grumble, I suppose, no matter what happens either in politics or weather conditions, but now they have passed the grumbling stage. Farmers to-day are spiteful, and ready, even eager, to bite anybody, even to commit that heresy of biting—I speak politically—the Conservative Party. The reason for this bitter mood is because their particular industry has been denied its fair share in the general tariff policy of the nation. Farmers generally are sick and tired of doles, sops, and subsidies, and all the other special political treatment which their industry receives, and threaten to vote against the Government unless farming is treated on all fours with other industries of equal size and importance.

This, of course, cannot and will not happen while farming boasts a special ministry of its own, for that ministry has been used by successive governments mainly to bamboozle farmers that they were getting something special and at the same time to deny them the political protection granted to others. Recently the result of this has been, while farmers have been forced to bear the odium of being dole-drawers in receipt of subsidies from the national purse, that they have been forced to pay out far more cash than they received in this fashion in tariffs on their purchases from town businesses. In consequence, a rapidly increasing number of farmers are coming to the sad but sensible conclusion that their industry would be better off if its special ministry were abolished and it had to take its chance with the others under the Board of Trade. "Then," farmers are saying, "we should get the same political treatment as the rest, and under either Free Trade for all or tariffs for all, farming would do quite as well and better than most town industries." I have even heard one irate farmer suggest that he would like to see the motor trade, minus any tariff protection, wrestling with a Marketing Board. That certainly does seem an attractive proposition.

However, there is no doubt that farmers have at last realized that they are paying out far more in tariffs on their purchases than they are receiving in subsidies on their sales. One of my neighbours has evidently been digging into statistics, for here is how he put the case of the dairy farmer this morning. He stated that the average milk-producer in this country kept eighteen dairy cows, paid annually in tariffs on his purchases to help other industries the value of one cow, yet that his annual share of farming subsidies and the like came to only the value of a milk bucket.

"And I don't want their bloody bucket," he shouted. "It's an

insult. I can buy all the buckets I require. But I do want my cow back."

Knowing the speaker, I should say that his valuation of both deficit and receipt was correct, and the way he illustrated them seemed to me to put the farming grumble into a nutshell.

XVIII

Somehow or other I have just been inveigled into accepting the office of Joint Hunt Secretary, not—I have made this quite plain—with any idea of it being a permanent job, but merely as a stop-gap until the end of the current season. Thanks be, the other man who succumbed in similar fashion to the blandishments of various neighbours is a farmer friend who already gives every evidence that he will be quite content to do all the work always provided that I will take some of the blame. In reality this means that he will do all the outside work in the country, that is to say the real work, leaving me to play with the clerical side. This seems to be an admirable division of labour, for alas, while I am at home often enough to keep accounts and collect subscriptions, I can rarely get in more than one day's hunting a week, and often a fortnight goes by without my seeing hounds.

What does worry me over this new job is that I know little or nothing of what is expected of me, and for guidance have only the memory of how an M.F.H. of the old school defined the duties of Hunt Secretary in my hearing a few years ago.

"A Hunt Secretary's job," he said, "is to keep the accounts, collect the subs, keep the farmers happy, get the wire down or put jumps in the bloody stuff, and efface himself generally. And the last, my lad, is the most important of all."

Well, I reckon I can do that most important thing fairly well—anyway I can but try—but the past few hectic days of September have shown me that the position of the country-side in the life of the British nation is very similar to that of the perfect Hunt Secretary in the eyes of the M.F.H. Farming folk may look upon the country-side as the business premises of one of the nation's greatest industries. A minority of townsfolk may regard it as the nation's fourth line of defence. Others may consider it an expensive sporting estate, and many a free playground for their leisure. It is not until trouble comes

that one obtains any insight into the real position which it holds in the minds of the majority of Britons.

In these days there are two troubles which sometimes threaten town-dwellers. One is danger to their pockets, and the other danger to their skins. When either looms large upon the horizon they turn to the country-side for comfort. When town industries fail to employ their workers, there is always a loud cry for schemes to put these unwanted people on to the land. In other words, to use the country-side as a dump for something for which the town has no longer a profitable use. Instead of town industries dealing with their surplus labour, they would hand that distasteful task on to farming; an industry which in good times they openly and loudly deride. For years now country-folk have become accustomed to this sort of thing; but recently they saw a new conception of the country-side in the townsman's mind. His skin was in danger, and so he fled to the country-side for safety. Houses a hundred miles from town suddenly became easily saleable at an enhanced price. Town children must be sent immediately from the danger zone to the comparative safety of the country-side. The majority of expensive cars seemed to have their bonnets pointed westwards out of London. Down here in Wessex, instead of singing, "Drake is going west," we noticed that wealth was coming west as fast as traffic regulations would permit.

Which seemed to me to be reasonable enough. God forbid that I should be condemned to live in town, even when peace and safety rule the world, and very certainly the country loses none of its attractions for me when those satisfying things in human life suddenly disappear. But here is a point which I think needs some emphasis just now. If the country-side is to be a town rubbish-heap during trade depression and a town funkhole during danger, surely to goodness the town can have no objection to paying generously for its upkeep during a time of peace and prosperity?

I do not think many townsfolk can have any idea of the real fear which filled farmers' minds during those recent days of crisis; or of the annoyance which they feel when the country-side is denied equal political treatment with the town and yet expected to come to the succour of the town in times of emergency. This is what I heard a farmer say the other day.

"War's terrible, and goodness knows I don't want to see it. But there's one thing about it which I fear more than an enemy attack. I'm willing, either as a soldier or as a civilian, to take my luck about getting killed; but what I fear most in the event of war is not a foreign

enemy with his weapons, but a horde of panic-stricken townsfolk streaming out into the country-side." Which was not a pleasant thing to say, but there was a deal of truth behind it.

Generally speaking, people in the country-side are willing for it to be used as a sanctuary for townsfolk, especially for town children, during a time of danger; but, now that danger has passed for the moment and those expensive cars have journeyed back eastwards, I suppose the country-side must copy the Hunt Secretary and be content to efface itself until the town happens to need it as a funkhole once again. Rather a bitter prophecy, I admit, but what farmer doubts its truth?

XIX

Once again agriculture seems to be coming into the news, not only in this country but all over the world. Here the recent war scare has made thousands of town-dwellers what the film people would describe as "agriculture conscious"; while in almost every country in the world the distressed condition of the oldest industry is causing grave concern.

Everywhere the farmer is complaining that the townsman is refusing to the primary producer the same standard of living as that which he enjoys. One reads of erosion, of dust storms, of derelict farms, and of destitute farming folk the world over. Somehow or other farming does not pay, rural parents are advising their children to seek town employment, and nowadays few farmers in any country can think that world war would profit them. Indeed, soon after the last great war the peasant farmer in Central Europe coined the phrase, "Whoever wins the next war, the peasant will lose it," a proverb in which he implicitly believes.

But in the midst of the world-wide cry, "How can farming be made to pay?" comes a deal of criticism from non-farmers, most of it in this strain: "Of course, farming does not pay. How can it do so when farmers are so old-fashioned, so narrow-minded, and so slow to adopt modern methods? Look at the improvements in town industries during the last twenty years. Manufacturing, communication, transport, in fact everything save farming has progressed by leaps and bounds, while farming has stayed out in the rut of our grandfathers."

Well, now, is that sort of thing quite correct? To my mind it is untrue, both in whole and in detail. Farming is still a long way ahead of town industries, and, instead of being stationary in a rut, it is plodding steadily forwards every day. History shows that the farmer had some three thousand years start of the industrialist; in fact, the latter slept in all that time, so to speak, while the wideawake farmer was up and doing. Recently the speed of farming's progress has been slower than the industrialist's and for good reason. How could the farmer have progressed at the same speed as the industrialist during the last quarter century? For one thing, there was no need, because he was such a long way ahead; and, for another, how could he be as fresh at the end of a three-thousand-year race as the industrialist who had only been running for little over one hundred years? I will readily admit that the speed at which the industrialist has been sprinting that short run has been fast, but what a lazy inefficient person he was before. Why, there was no improvement in transport speed from Julius Caesar to William the Fourth, nearly two thousand years. Think what would have happened to mankind if the farmer had been as lazy during that time.

That may be, argues the town critic of farming, but look at the improvement in transport speed since that date in the short space of little over two hundred years. It is little short of miraculous. Which everyone will admit, especially with the Prime Minister's recent rapid travelling so vividly in mind.

But, even so, neither transport speed nor any other town industry has as yet caught up with farming, but still lags woefully behind. Present-day farming progress may be slow, but that long start of three thousand years or so still enables farming to keep the lead. To-day the farmer all over the world can with truth accuse town industries with being away behind farming, and argue justly that their laggard position is the major cause, not only of farming's ills but also of those of the world in general.

For some years now farming has produced a plentiful supply of produce of all kinds, but not yet has the clever town industrialist learned how to distribute that bounty from the good earth. In fact, in many cases his only solution is to destroy that produce, what time millions starve for want of food. Here is an example of the inadequacy of modern transport. Recently growers have shipped first-quality Bartlett pears across the Atlantic from Canada to England, with the result that they have been out of pocket the cost of the boxes. This summer in Ontario fine peaches were sold as low as thirty-five cents

(less than eighteen-pence) for an eight-quart basket, and many left to rot as such a price hardly paid for the gathering and the cost of the basket. Nothing the matter with production—everything the matter with distribution.

Generally speaking, in all forms of agriculture throughout the world the same lamentable state of things obtains. Farming is so far ahead of town civilization that mankind makes but a sorry attempt to deal with its vast production, much as it needs it for humanity's sake. So instead of criticizing farming for being old-fashioned it is high time that those responsible for our other great industries realized their shameful position in the march of time, and endeavoured to shorten the long lead which farming still holds over them all.

XX

October brings all sorts of things to the country-side—farm sales, Michaelmas changes of tenancy, the pheasant in season, wheat-sowing, and many others which have a direct connection with agriculture. To the provincial cathedral city it brings the annual Diocesan Conference. This year that event has produced the following story, which I defy anyone to fault. It comes, as all good things come, straight out of the earth.

The conference of the clergy coincided with market-day, and, noticing a cluster of parsons near the Close Gates, one farm labourer remarked to his companion, "Tom, the town's vull o' passons."

"Ay, 'tis you," replied the other. "Zno, Bill, I do allus thing as passons be jist like dung."

"'Od d'ye make that out, Tom?"

"They bain't no good in a 'eap. Spread 'em thin awver the country-side an' they mid do a bit o' good."

With great glee I told this tale to a clerical friend the other day. He informed me that he considered such a description a great compliment to the Cloth, but suggested that of late years the coating of clerical dung over the country-side had been getting woefully thin.

XXI

The last week or so has shown everybody just how charming October can be when he is in the right mood. I have referred to this

month in masculine terms, because the winter months are surely male in character. October is usually a pleasant fellow; November glooms about the place rather like a husband who has broken his favourite pipe or just lost a golf match by six and five; one imagines December and January sitting by the fire mixing hot grog; February does not quite know whether to be a cad or a gentleman; while March blusters like the male parent of Victorian times.

Just lately October has been especially pleasant. A chilly mist in the early morning, and soon, when the sun has broken through, a golden day until sundown. Definitely the sort of weather to make one glad to be alive, and to be more than ever convinced that rural England is a very pleasant place in which to have one's being.

As a result of his genial mood all farm work has made good strides. One farming friend writes me that he has a score of gangs busy at sugar beet and potatoes. Another that he has got a mechanical beet-lifter going well, now that there is less mud in the fields. The threshing-machine hums daily, and everywhere I go I see wheat-sowing in progress. Last week I managed to get in thirty acres of wheat not too badly. Mid-October, is to my mind, the best date for wheat-sowing in this light downland country. I have grown good crops from mid-November sowing, but most years the earlier sowing has won easily at harvest time. I have also sown wheat before Michaelmas Day, October 11, but almost invariably it failed to live up to its first promise.

Which reminds me that grain-cleaning machinery must have improved tremendously during the last twenty years or so, for although there seem to be more weeds, not less, in our farming fields, every sample of seed wheat which I have looked at recently was perfectly free from weed seeds of any kind. But I can well remember my father sowing a small field with some expensive seed wheat in order to provide seed for the farm the following year; and that for some reason or other, probably the type of season, when the crop was threshed the sample contained what he called "Clyder." I do not know the proper name for this weed, but as children we always called its seeds, which stuck fast to our clothing, "Sweethearts."

The trouble in this particular case was that as these weed seeds were about the same size and weight as a wheat corn, neither the winnowing machine nor the boby screen would take them out. However, my Victorian parent was a tenacious person, and determined to use his wheat for seed according to plan. If there was no machine on the market to clean it properly, he would make one.

Which he did. He constructed a short moving elevator of, I think, horse-collar cloth. This was fixed at the tail of the winnowing machine, and driven by a leather belt. The wheat was delivered on to the bottom of it, was carried up the slope, where it then fell off on to the barn floor. But the clyder seeds or sweethearts stuck to the cloth and were carried round on the under-side, where a steel knife scraped them off into a drawer. Result, a clean sample of seed wheat, and a father in the best humours imaginable.

XXII

I have recently had a gyro-tiller breaking up some seven acres of gorse and scrub on the top of the down. Undoubtedly it has done a good job, and a piece of land which has not been not only unproductive, but a harbour for rabbits ever since I can remember, is at least showing signs of becoming a small asset to the farm instead of remaining a huge liability. True, there is still a dickens of a lot of work to be done before anything can be sown, but by next spring we hope to have this field looking more like a field and a deal less like a rubbish-heap, which is what it most resembles at the moment.

I want to turn it into fairish grazing land as soon as possible, but to do so will be mainly hand-work, for I doubt whether I shall ever get it level enough for modern implements to travel at ease. This afternoon one of my very good friends described the job as "Street's Folly" and from an economic point of view it undoubtedly merits such a description. But somehow I have a notion that I shall obtain considerable satisfaction when the transformation is complete. Anyway, I have already obtained some satisfaction, for a considerable number of my natural enemies, rabbits, have disappeared. When the gyro-tiller invaded their sanctuary, many of these must have thought the end of the world had come.

XXIII

Nowadays there does not seem to be one single departure of farming and country life which has not felt the effect of the increasing use of the internal combustion engine. Indeed, during recent years many rural

things have been changed considerably. Not the least of these is the altered valuation by farmers of the geographical situation of a farm.

In discussing the advantages and disadvantages of different farms with my friends who are in search of one this remark almost invariably comes into the conversation.

"No, I shouldn't care for that place. It's too near a town, and the main road runs through it."

In my boyhood those two objections would have been deemed decided attractions by every farmer. To be near a town meant that the railway station was not very far away, while a main road running past the buildings meant easier hauling for one's horses. But now very little farm produce ever reaches the railway, and the motor traffic makes that same road a death-trap, and a daily worry. Anyone who has had to get a large herd of dairy cows across a main road twice daily will know just what a summer worry it can be.

In addition, proximity to a town means that one's farm is overrun with people who, wittingly and unwittingly, thereby handicap its operations. That, of course, sounds rather dog-in-the-mangerish, but the fact remains that both crops and stock get along far better when undisturbed by strangers who are ignorant of their needs. Indeed, the most unbiased observer must admit that to farm ten miles away from either town, station, or main road is a decided advantage. The situation defends the farm from the troubles I have mentioned, and the car and motor-lorry have largely discounted the one-time disadvantages of such a distance from town.

So here for the moment I would speak of the charms and advantages of the Chalk Valley—for I refuse to succumb to snobbery and add the "e" to the name. Possibly I am rather foolish to do this, for I do not own one foot of that countryside, although I hope some day so to do. Every farmer, I suppose, has a Naboth's Vineyard somewhere or other, and I freely confess that mine lies somewhere towards the top of the valley of the Ebble. Whether time and circumstance will ever enable me to attain it is questionable, but here are some of its features which I find so attractive.

Firstly, it is good farming country. Secondly, from it one can neither see nor hear a train. Thirdly, although there is a good road through the valley, I cannot imagine it ever becoming a main road for many, many years to come. It is that last point which makes the Chalk Valley so attractive. To the south of it runs the Salisbury-Dorchester road; to the north runs the modern speed track from Salisbury to Exeter. But up the middle of the valley a road which will

never be a main road twists and turns, passing a peaceful village every mile or so, and eventually reaching Shaftesbury, during its career often splitting into two and coming together again.

How peaceful are those villages! I rode through one this morning at 6 a.m.—peace, perfect peace. On my return I passed through at 10.30 a.m.—seeing one dog, two cats, one woman on a bicycle, and a farm-cart. In the afternoon, in order to make sure, I drove through about 4 p.m., meeting one bus, one motor-lorry, a postman on a bike, two pedestrians, three dogs, and one cat. Lovely!

XXIV

During the last few weeks there has been a bounteous crop of mushrooms in most districts, with the result that in many cases trespassers and farmers have been exchanging high words. The townsman may object to buying the produce of England's farms at a fair price; but, when he considers that he has the legal right to get some of it for nothing, he goes in, literally, with both feet. Moreover, when this chance occurs he is willing to rise early in the morning and to drive his car twelve miles in order to take it.

Many of my town friends who admit doing this tell me that the expenses of the journey are often four times the value of the booty thus obtained, but that even so they think it good business. It is, I suppose, the sport of gathering mushrooms which balances the account, or the mental satisfaction of getting something without paying for it directly. Well, that being so, surely the farmer's sporting rights in mushrooms should be worth money to him?

For aught I know any one, provided he does no damage, has the right to gather mushrooms from a field unless the farmer can prove that he has cultivated them, and the generally accepted idea seems to be that to do this the farmer must have sown some mushroom spawn. But is this the only method of cultivating this crop? Again and again I am coming across instances—I have them on my own farm—where grassing down and heavily stocking land which had been arable since time out of mind has brought mushrooms in quantity where none had ever shown before.

To my mind the change in agricultural practice has undoubtedly produced the mushrooms, which, under such conditions, should surely

be classed as cultivated. Indeed, I think it is high time that the law was altered to make mushrooms on any field under any circumstances the property of the person who farms the ground. In common fairness the produce of any land should belong to the person who shoulders the liabilities attached to farming it.

XXV

For some years now the farming prejudice against tractors has largely disappeared, and this tool is to-day a familiar implement on almost every sizeable farm. Indeed, what was reckoned to be one of the chief drawbacks of the tractor some twenty years ago is now considered a definite recommendation for its use. When tractors first appeared in our fields everybody grouched about their wheel-tracks, and from one's ancient and valued head carter one heard this sort of thing:

"I tell 'ee wot 'tis. They things bain't no good on ploughed ground. Fact o' it, they do do 'arm. They do squeeze too 'ard. Whoi! Even the cultivator 'oon't take out they wheel-tracks."

At that date most farmers agreed, and went to great pains to take out the wheel-tracks, but now there seems to be a complete reversal of farming opinion in this matter. The repeated sight of better crops in streaks across the field corresponding to the tractor's wheel-tracks is responsible. Now, especially on light land, there is general agreement amongst farmers that the more one can get the tractor over it the better.

Indeed, one of my neighbours told me the other day that while dressing down ploughed and pressed land behind the broadcast when wheat-sowing, he used a narrow set of drags in order to get the tractor wheels over every inch of the land if possible. In fact, he almost suggested that if this could be achieved it would not matter much whether the tractor hauled any drags or not. The crops which he regularly grows are sound evidence in favour of his methods.

In spite of rooks, starlings, and its many other enemies, wheat is generally showing a good plant this autumn, some fields exhibiting almost a spring green covering over the soil. Nowadays a greater proportion of winter wheat seems to be drilled instead of being broadcast, a change which is probably due to two reasons. The minor one is, I think, due to the improvement in disk drills of all kinds. This type of grain drill will do a fairish job on a seed-bed so wet that the older shoe type would clog up every twenty yards or so. But the major reason

is surely because that old-time team of three single ploughs and a presser is hard to find on most farms to-day. I will admit that in the hands of a good man a tractor, plough, and presser can do a fairish job, indeed a good enough job for most occasions; but no ploughing and pressing by modern implements will ever attain the high standard of that performed by the Victorian head carter and his underlings.

Few people to-day have any idea of the rigid discipline exercised by an autocratic head carter of years ago. Indeed, in my boyhood his whip was not confined to the backs of his horses; the laggard and the inefficient lad tasted it as well. How wrong, some people will say, but I wonder? As a small boy such men chastised me when my catapult or original sin led me into crime, and were applauded by my father, their employer, for so doing. But I grew up to know them as good friends, and even to-day my memories of them are the pleasantest imaginable.

XXVI

The other day a town friend asked if the English village was done for, to which I answered a very definite "No," which I qualified by admitting that the average village had changed far more during the past twenty years than it had in the previous two hundred. As I was hacking along the old Shaftesbury turnpike this morning—incidentally this was once a main road, is now a gloriously private green track, and soon, so rumour hath it, will be a main road once again, which God forbid—I thought of this conversation as I looked down at the cosy villages in the valley below. I thought of their past history, and the many changes which it had brought to them.

In the old days of road transport the village, especially the village on a main road, must have been quite a lively place. When the nation's transport forsook the road for the rail, many people prophesied the finish of the village, saying that it was as good as dead. This proved to be incorrect, for the simple reason that the purpose of the village remained unaltered.

The roads might be deserted, and visiting travellers few and far between, but the village just blinked in the sun or cowered beneath the rain, and carried on as before. Its inhabitants farmed their land, ran their mills, enjoyed their rural sports, quarrelled a little, loved a little, and worshipped in their church or chapel in placid content. They were a self-contained little community, with no desire to interfere with the

outside world or for the outside world to interfere with them. Townsfolk may have thought them narrow-minded and dull, but they were still the solid background of our national life, one which did not change its hue with every new headline in the papers, a background set upon that stable basis, the land of England.

But when the motor-car arrived the village soon became aware that its isolation was a thing of the past. Few townsfolk have any conception of the enormous effect which mechanical road transport has had on village life. Suddenly, without warning almost, the village became a suburb of the town, and all sorts of new and exciting things were available to the villager. And again people prophesied the death of the village owing to its youth deserting it for the attractions and amenities of the town.

Again the village refused to die. Although many young village folk did drift and still are drifting to the towns, the internal combustion engine and other modern inventions greatly increased and are still continuing to increase the population of many villages. Thus, the village took on a new lease of life, but of a very different type, for now the purpose of the village had altered.

Hitherto this had remained unchanged. Since time out of mind the village had comprised a few farm-houses, the necessary cottages and buildings, a church, a chapel, a school, a smithy, a wheelwright's shop, a general store and bakery, a mill maybe, a rectory, a manor house, and one or two others. This small cluster of buildings had been erected to house a small community which lived by serving the land around it, and while this remained its main purpose village life continued almost unchanged by the march of progress.

But to-day this old-time main purpose of the village is fast becoming a sideline. Every improvement in communication and transport and every new invention used in agriculture helps to hasten this change. Competition from overseas forces farmers to use more and more machinery and less man-power. Swift and cheap transport enables many of those who are condemned to do their work in the noise and rush of the modern town to live in the comparative peace of the village. Indeed, the main purpose of the modern village seems to be either catering for the needs of the town visitor or enabling the modern village dweller to get to and from the town in the shortest possible time.

This means the finish of village life as it existed from time immemorial. Already village cricket and football are dying, almost dead. The desire for Sedgebury Wallop to defeat Little Mudbury has faded

out now that the personnel of both teams can watch first-class players for a few pence. Village entertainment has lost much of its attraction now that the cinema is within easy reach. Neither church nor chapel can withstand the competition of the seaside and other distant pleasures which the charabanc has brought so close. Rural education has been centralized, and village children now begin their day with a motor ride to the central school. Even the old-time dances and customs are now carried on chiefly by the would-be villager from town, what time the descendants of the old performers seek distraction as far away from the village as modern invention and their purses can contrive.

In every big change mankind both gains and loses. In this change it is easy to see the gains—better housing, better lighting, better water-supplies, better sanitation, better education, an easier access to the arts and entertainments, in fact a broader and better life for the villager, in which he is able to obtain the best of both possible worlds—those of town and country. The losses are not so easy to enumerate, because, if the gains are almost entirely material, the losses must be of an opposite nature. They can best be summed up by saying that village life is fast losing its permanence and its individuality. If you import two hundred townsmen and their families into a village, and house them, while you may have created a suburb, you will have destroyed a village. In other words, modern invention has bestowed fluidity with one hand and taken away stability with the other. Somehow, although I cannot put it into words, I regret this, for I know that the background of a village upbringing some forty years ago is a very valuable thing to any man or woman to-day, even though he or she may have left the village to live and work in a town.

It is dangerous to prophesy, but there seems no doubt that this alteration in the character of our village population will continue in the future at even greater speed. As transport improves, so will villages farther off to-day's beaten track receive an influx of town-dwellers. As noise and mechanization increases in the city, so more and more will youth flock there, and middle-age come to the village. It may well be that before many years hence farming will be reduced to a mere detail in our national life, a job to be performed by many wonderful machines and a few clever human beings working very short hours. That the existing differences between townsfolk and countryfolk will disappear for the common good, and that the village of the future will boast the advantages of both town and country and the disadvantages of neither. This must mean the the new village will be considered to be more important than the land around it, a direct contrast to the

old-time state of affairs. It is to be hoped that it will also mean that the old village has been replaced by something much better.

We cannot stop this change; we should not wish to stop it; we must therefore watch it happen, but in so doing we should also watch carefully that in the process we do not lose something more precious than the thing we gain, something which, when once destroyed, we can never replace—that sleepy, lovely English village, even to-day the real heart of England.

XXVII

Usually I work my business trips in London so that I can get home the same day, but the other week I stayed the night in order to have a look at the Dairy Show on the following morning. A twopenny ride on top of a bus—and incidentally I know of no better twopennyworth—once again made me speculate as to how all the people in London manage to get a living. In the country one can make a fairly accurate estimate of everyone's activities, both business and social; but in town the doings of that horde of anxious faces and hurrying feet are "wropt in mystery." But when I entered the Agricultural Hall it was a case of a countryman finding a truly rural home in town, for every yard of the way I was meeting old friends.

As ever, the Dairy Show was a good show, and its excellence illustrated to every visitor the important part which this section still plays in our oldest industry. But at first glance it seemed as though the dairying branch of farming had dispensed with the cow. I found myself surrounded on all sides by science, manufacturing, and commerce. Seemingly modern dairying was chiefly concerned with either cooling milk, sterilizing it, pasteurizing it, bottling it, delivering it, or selling it; and for a moment I began to wonder whether any animals were a necessary complement to these marvels.

However, I found the cows all right, and to the other section of the show they provided a very pleasant and necessary contrast. There is a placid dignity about a cow chewing the cud which no bottling machine will ever attain; and the scent—I use the word advisedly—of the byre is a comforting thing to find in London town. So I stayed quite a while with the cows, admiring the products of a type of farming to which I shall never aspire, the breeding of pedigree stock for competition in the show ring. I am a commercial dairyman, and know my

humble place in the farming scheme. That is why I can never appreciate the finer points of the various breeds. For instance, while Ayrshires are good dairy cattle, I can never—how some of my Scottish farmer friends will scorn me for this—cotton to the way in which their horns are set. It gives them such a surprised look, rather like the ultra-modern girl who has plucked her eyebrows into a permanent line of amazement.

Friesian cattle I respect as milk factories, but no one could call them pretty cattle. The Dairy Shorthorn makes my living, but of all the breeds it is the Guernsey which I love. Which sounds ungrateful, perhaps, but I cannot help it; I just love the look of a good Guernsey cow. Many years ago, when dairying paid handsomely and I therefore possessed more money than sense, I once bid a man seventy pounds for a little Guernsey heifer which was springing to calve, and he refused it. When I told this to an old farmer friend his comment was something to the effect that "two bloody fools met," which may or may not have been true.

But no matter which breed of dairy cattle a farmer favours, every farmer must admit that it is a good thing to have an annual Dairy Show in the heart of our capital city, and to exhibit at it as many cows as possible. For the more we divorce the town consumer from the actual animal which produces the food he consumes the worse for the future of our farming industry. Already, as a result of modern transport, and modern mechanization as applied to farming all over the world, the taste of the youth of the nation has become vitiated.

Several years of school diet have taught my own daughter to turn up her nose at good Cornish dairy butter, of which I eat far too much. No longer a schoolgirl, she still prefers an imported white butter, which to me is flavourless, on the grounds that English dairy butter is too "cowy." An old friend of mine, who gardens hard and well as a pleasant hobby during retirement, tells me that his children prefer canned vegetables to the ones which he provides by the sweat of his aged brow. I know many young folk who dislike good Wiltshire bacon, because they say that when they are eating it they are forced to realize that it came from a pig; while a palate for good cheese appears to be non-existent in everybody under thirty, all of whom prefer to eat what my father called "soap."

I suppose the chief reason for this change of taste is the effect of standardization in most walks of life. The natural product varies, while the synthetic or even the factory-produced does not; but whatever may be the cause, there is no doubt that the youth of the nation would

welcome a synthetically produced dietary which would be cheap, mild in taste, and of a standardized flavour.

Coming midway between the old and new generations I have a foot in both camps in this matter. I like *good* English dairy butter, *good* Wiltshire bacon, *good* fresh vegetables, and *good* Cheddar or Stilton cheese. But I must confess that I prefer canned or factory produce of all kinds to *bad* English farm products.

And that preference every one of us who farms in this island must study carefully. We *can* give the consumer a better article of food than anyone in the world, either farmer, scientist, or manufacturer; but unless we do this, much of our business will slip away into other hands.

Sometimes I think that we are not half proud enough of English produce, and especially of the local variety. In France one drinks the wine of the particular district one happens to be in, and one feeds on the dishes which have earned local fame. But here we seem to be abandoning these valuable things in favour of a standardized sameness.

For instance, what has happened to the English walnuts of my youth? Have we cut our walnut-trees down in order to veneer furniture and make rifle-stocks, or is it that for some generations now no one has planted sufficient of them to replace the ravages of time and tempest? Anyway, the fact remains that some thirty odd years ago I could buy English walnuts—good ones—at the rate of twenty a penny, and that now I pay at least four times the price for a very inferior sample. Much the same might be said of filberts. Cob nuts one can get, but the old English filbert with a flavour that matched an October fireside seems to be non-existent.

I mention this because a town friend made the same complaint the other evening. "Don't talk to me of over-production," he said. "Why the devil don't you produce more filberts? When you get over-production in them I'll guarantee to take all the surplus at a fair price. To-day you can't get 'em for love or money."

Just one more note. Many years ago Mr. Punch published a poem, describing the appearance and habits of the countryfolk who visited London to attend the Dairy Show. One verse which I can remember more or less accurately went something like this:

From hamlets far away they wend,
They breathe the air of brake and coppice.
They know not which the bottom end
Of Regent Street, nor which the top is.
They also cube by devious jinks
Their journeys on the tube.

The other day the British farmer looked every inch, either up and down or roundabout, a sophisticated townsman.

XXVIII

Winter may not have quite reported present, but already one can see him coming along not so very far down the lane. During the last week or so the leaves have been coming down very quickly, not, I think, because of the frost now, but because of late frost last spring. The beeches especially have looked ragged and brown for months, and this season have never quite attained their usual summer clothing.

The rapid baring of the trees everywhere makes one's thoughts turn to winter work and winter sport. The promise of the latter seems good. Pheasants, both wild and hand-reared, have done well, and soon the covers will be bare enough for the beaters to render an account of the keeper's stewardship. The cub-hunting season has been a good one, certainly much better than last year's, when there was hard ground and little scent right up to the end of October. During the last few weeks the most active cub has been hard put to it to save his brush. Instead of being able to lie safely hidden in the undergrowth, he has been soon disturbed, and forced to bustle at full speed.

I like the way in which the average cubbing-field shows by its attire just how near or how far away is the opening meet. I am not rash enough to mention this subject in connection with the ladies, who are a law unto themselves, but the gentlemen provide sufficient illustration. In early August seemingly anything will do—a cap, a polo-necked sweater, and most disreputable jodhpurs. September is apt to be a trifle wet in the early mornings, so the old breeches and rubber exercise boots are seen, but still surmounted by a cap, and sometimes, it must be admitted, a trilby. October brings a general feeling that some steps towards tidiness must be made, and by the end of this month the bowler, collar and tie, and the smartest hacking jacket are general. November brings the opening meet and the full sartorial splendour. It is to be hoped that foot-and-mouth will keep away, and permit the full pageantry of fox-hunting to adorn the country-side regularly throughout the winter.

Here be it understood that I am no thruster in the hunting-field, which is perhaps why I rather prefer cub-hunting to hunting proper later on. In other words I do not hunt to ride, but ride to hunt. I like to watch the sunrise flush the eastern sky, to see the mist vanish as the

sun climbs the heaven and then to glory in the picture of rural England basking, and sparkling in the warm golden sunshine of September. I like the feel of the early morning after bed; I like to meet my neighbours in such a setting; and after cub-hunting I always ride home feeling very grateful that my lot has been cast in such pleasant country ways.

Always when I go hunting, the thought comes to me that fox-hunting is about the only bit of truly rural pageantry remaining. Folk-dancing, maypoles, and the like are merely revivals by townsfolk; fox-hunting is a survival.

In spite of an increasing storm of criticism and disapproval, wherever the march of progress has left sufficient suitable country-side one still finds fox-hunting carrying on. And how well it matches the rural scene! To a film-conscious population one might well describe it as being O.K. for colour, sound, and movement; perhaps adding that weather conditions are a most competent and artistic producer. During recent years the censor, which is town and all town stands for, has forbidden many country-side plays, and already he frowns over this one. One unrepentant farmer here pleads with him to permit the country-side to make its annual quota of fox-hunting pictures for many more years to come.

But I doubt it, and the mere plea will write me down in the eyes of a good many townsfolk as a brute beast of no understanding. The towns will get bigger and bigger, until the day dawns when there will be no country-side remaining in this island—a park, either private or national, is not real country-side—and our only relics of fox-hunting will be a gramophone record of John Peel, and perhaps another of an outside broadcast. Ah, well, by that time may I be sleeping safe in Wiltshire's chalk.

WINTER

I

IN my youth I looked upon the coming of winter with regret, but now I find myself welcoming him with open arms. Why? There is only one answer, simply because, to paraphrase the song, "This old horse, he ain't what he used to be, many a year ago." In other words, time has taken its toll of my powers, and my slow and far too heavy middle-age finds winter's rural sports, pastimes, and temperatures much more to its liking than the athletic pursuits and heat of summer-time.

One needs to be young to play tennis all day and every day; modern bathing costumes hardly suit rotund middle-age; even rural cricket has been speeded up of late; shooting and hunting are taboo, heat and flies make even hacking more a penance than a pleasure; and so in the summer there is only fishing for the likes of me, who somehow or other cannot raise a passion for bowls, and just loathes golf under summer's conditions of tip and run.

But when winter comes I sit up and take notice. For one thing another farming year has been started for better or worse, and the only sensible thing is to get on with it to the best of one's ability, postponing any future heart-searchings as to change of staff, methods, or rental until that far-off time of next September. For another, a lower temperature has reduced the fly population to bearable proportions, making riding a pleasure, and made it possible for even fifteen stone of flesh to draw the outside gun of a wide turn after partridges without a qualm.

Winter fetches the leaf from the trees, and so grants us cover-shooting, a sport in which walking is reduced to a minimum, and therefore one which enables age to compete with youth on equal terms. Hunting proper begins, which means that the meet is now at 11 a.m. This enables one to rise at a reasonable hour, and gives one time to deal with the mail, and to see the farm's work well begun before setting out. On a fine day grayling can still be coaxed to take a fly; one's approaches now stay on the greens; and, best of all, the country-side is left almost entirely private to those who really belong to it. In fact, when winter comes, no matter how far away spring may be, there is no doubt that the stout middle-aged countryman such as I comes into his own once again.

II

The dissatisfaction with the Government's agricultural policy or lack of one seems to be becoming widespread. I have just received a cutting from a Yorkshire paper, which tells me that northern farmers are quite as disgruntled as southern ones.

Criticism of any agricultural revolt against the present Government now takes the obvious line that, owing to the difficulties of the international situation, farmers throughout the country should refrain from embarrassing politicians. Which cuts little ice with the many farmers who have watched their capital shrink and their land deteriorate during the last ten years or so, especially when comparatively recent history tells so plainly that the only way to obtain political satisfaction is by fighting. Ireland and women suffrage are typical examples of this. The fact is, despite the idea that the meek are supposed to be blessed, in politics such virtue is presumed to be its own reward. To quote the old proverb, "Dumb folks get no lands." It seems only fair to suggest that from modern governments they get devilish little of anything.

However, we farmers should realize more than we do perhaps that to plead for or demand a policy to help farmers is worse than useless. Our best course is to demand a policy to help the land, the one thing which cannot speak for itself. Which means, of course, that instead of preaching to farming folk in rural districts, we should turn our attention to townsfolk, and try to point out to them their danger in a badly farmed, impoverished land. For, whether farmers relish it or not, the truth is that the townsman's vote decides the agricultural policy of this country.

Moreover, the average townsman or townswoman is far more interested in our country-side than many countryfolk imagine, and especially now with the fear of a war famine in his mind. Townsfolk generally permit agriculture to be neglected politically not from desire but from ignorance. They do not know—how can they?—anything of its problems and difficulties; and, while leading politicians repeatedly tell them that compared with our export trade farming matters very little, they cannot be blamed for considering home farming as being of little importance.

But I am convinced that they do care, and that they care deeply for the land of their own country. Therefore, I repeat, the thing to do is for farming folk to do their utmost to give their town cousins

correct information about the state of farming, rather than to waste time preaching to the converted. My own experience suggests that they will obtain a sympathetic hearing in almost every case. Quite frankly, if farmers intend to run agricultural candidates at elections they should do so in Birmingham, London, or some other large city.

The point to drive home is that in time of national emergency the inherent weakness of the town and its dependence on the country-side becomes very evident, something of which we have had ample illustration only a few weeks back. Therefore in normal times the town should insist on the maintenance of a strong and flourishing country-side in a fit state to shoulder the added burden of the town's weakness, something which will become a serious national problem the moment the abnormal situation arrives. For this island nation to farm well during peace is one of its best, if not the best safeguard from danger in time of war. In short, to look after the land properly at all times must help everybody in Britain and can harm nobody.

But who is to preach such a doctrine? The truth, or rather the shame, of the matter is that the only man who can give orders that Britain's land shall be farmed a deal better in the immediate future than it has been during the past twenty years is a foreigner, one who, I think, has never set foot on this island. His name is Adolf Hitler!

III

This evening after having attended the opening meet, spent some four or five hours in the saddle, then revelled in a hot bath, and subsequently fed both wisely and well, seems to be the proper time to think honestly for a while about fox-hunting.

Since time out of mind England's country life has suffered considerably because most of its critics argue from outside in, instead of from inside out; and during recent years this inequality has been even more marked. To-day the townsman considers himself qualified to lay down the law concerning every departure of the life of his country cousins. In his eyes their main business, farming, is run on the most hopelessly old-fashioned and uneconomic lines; their sports and pleasures are brutalizing; rural employers are tyrants, and their employees serfs; rural appreciation of the arts is almost non-existent; and country life generally can boast a very low standard of comparison with town.

But in this matter "only Satan can rebuke sin; the good don't know enough"; and nowhere is the town critic's lack of country knowledge

so glaringly exposed as is his attitude to the country-side during winter. In his eyes to spend summer in the country is a pleasant luxury; and conversely to be condemned to live and work there during the winter is hard, cruel hard. True, while enjoying a good meal in a well-lit and well-heated town restaurant, it may perhaps cross his mind that a few poor fools of peasants are necessary to his comfort, and deserving of his pity; but for him the country-side is a far, far country until next May or June.

No one should object to criticism—it is one of the necessary condiments to the meal of life—but it is at this season of the year that the countryman's activities earn for him the bulk of the townsman's censure. For during the dead of winter he is not content to work amidst mud and rain, envying townsfolk the while; in addition the poor uncultured peasant dares to enjoy himself, and to enjoy himself in a fashion which the town has condemned. He indulges in bloody sports. Worse than this, he admits quite frankly that he enjoys doing so. Of these, fox-hunting would seem to rouse the most scorn, so let me here discuss it in the light of my own experience.

No one who has never hunted has any right to criticize this sport, neither is such criticism of any value. No one should ever attempt to defend this sport, for by so doing one admits that it needs defending. Which is absurd, for hunting is to countryfolk just one of the natural happenings which come along in due season. One would never dream of defending harvest, or haymaking, or shearing, or spring, or butchering pigs, or gathering eggs; and hunting takes its place proper with these in the countryman's year. The differing seasons may be but pleasing happenings or infernal nuisances in town, but in the country they are the warp in the loom of life. Each brings its proper work and sport. When the countryman turns his cows out to grass in the spring, he also gets out his rod and net ready for the fishing. The turning colour of the wheat makes the countryman think of both harvest and duck-shooting. In September he will thatch his ricks and shoot his partridges. He must wait until the leaf is off the tree before he can drive his pheasants. And when winter arrives he ploughs his land, feeds his stock, and goes hunting. That is all there is to it.

In my opinion there is only one reason why any one goes hunting, and that is because he or she enjoys doing so. That this sport has a financial side, or that it kills a certain number of poultry-killing vermin annually is entirely beside the mark. Speaking for myself, and I think for the majority of hunting-folk, I say frankly that I do not hunt in order to give employment, to increase trade, to improve the breed of

horses, to reduce vermin, or to give the foxes in my district some beneficial exercise, but I do so because I enjoy it.

Now let me admit something, which is that I, a countryman, was once to be found amongst the critics of hunting-folk, the reason, of course, being that I was not one of them. I had given up hunting because I could no longer afford it, and when some ten years later I could have done so, other pleasures seemed preferable. A single-figure handicap seemed a far more worthy aim than to be up at the finish of a run. Moreover, I was then a good golfer, but knew I had always been a poor horseman. Besides, I was ten years older, ten years heavier, and I imagined ten years more sensible. Why risk one's neck in the hunting-field and hack home wet through in the winter dark, when these other pleasures were so much safer and surely more enjoyable? In addition, I found myself copying many of my town friends in criticizing hunting-folk. They were ill-mannered, cursing louts; they were swanks and snobs insufferable; I ridiculed their so-called hunting etiquette, and their absurd clothes. "Let 'em hunt," I said to myself, "me for golf every time."

Then, the claims of a small daughter and her pony led me, after a gap of fifteen years, to bestride a hireling one afternoon. Some one had to watch over her initiation, and I found running far too exhausting. From this to buying an old hack was a short step, and for a proud father occasionally to permit his offspring to have a peep at hounds in his company an even shorter one. But little girls do not stand still, more's the pity, and I soon found that I was a brake on this one's thrusting career in the hunting-field. Here let me warn any father to consider carefully before he teaches his children to jump; once this is accomplished, to accompany them during a quiet afternoon's hacking becomes a perilous business to the parent from start to finish.

However, I am not ashamed to tell to what depths I have sunk or to what heights I have risen as a result. By the process of trial and error I now own an old horse, a recent purchase, who realizes the value of his cargo. In order not to shame my child or myself I have endured intensive hours over hurdles in a riding-school. Despite this, I occasionally view the ground from an inglorious sprawl along my mount's neck. There is no more miserable man in Wilts than I when I am one side of a low rail, and no happier nor prouder man in all England when I am safely on the other. I find myself talking hunting as fervently and probably as boringly as the long handicap man talks golf. I get wet through, and arrive home tired and aching

all over, but always scheming how to dodge work and repeat the process as soon as possible.

Why hunting has captured my middle-age in this fashion I do not quite know. Goodness knows, I am no thruster, but merely an indifferent horseman, who appreciates thoroughly the kindly courtesy which he invariably receives from the expert in the hunting-field, and who never ceases to marvel at and be grateful for the generosity of the non-hunting farmer. Still, somehow the wet fields and the dripping hedgerows fascinate me. I find more real satisfaction and pleasure in jumping the smallest of fences than in making money in my calling, a grand slam at bridge, or in beating bogey. While so doing I have made a host of new friends of all classes, and know that my manners, always poor, have definitely improved; for hunting is a great educator in this respect. My knowledge and therefore my appreciation of the surrounding country-side has increased tremendously, and my very minor part in this one remaining bit of rural pageantry gives me great joy. To sum up, I do not know why I enjoy hunting; I only know that I enjoy it thoroughly. Indeed, I give it as my considered opinion that one day's hunting is worth ten days of any other pleasure which has ever come my way.

But now I find that there is a snag in it—this business of being a joint Hunt Secretary. The trouble is that I have succeeded a man who, although he could give me a round dozen of years, rode straight at everything, taking as his motto, "over, under, or through." Alas, I can boast neither the horsemanship nor the necessary pluck to copy his methods. I know that, but what I do not know for certain is whether I possess the necessary courage not to try.

However, after to-day I feel much happier in my mind concerning this problem for three distinct reasons. The first is because everybody in the Hunt seems to expect nothing further from me in my official position than to keep the accounts correctly, to ride with discretion, and occasionally, to provide the comic relief as heretofore. The second is because my colleague, God bless him, shows that he can take good care of any necessary thrusting on the part of the secretariat. The third is because my latest mount showed me to-day that he knows far more about cross country work than I do. His evident eagerness to take complete charge over any reasonable difficulty in our path, and my knowledge of the country's gaps and gates, bid fair to get us through any run. We shall never, of course, be the first; on occasion no doubt we shall be the last; but, either in

sedate co-operation, or even if a hard fate should force us to part company with each other, no one will ever describe us as the least.

IV

In common with most farmers I loathe subsidies as a form of political aid, although "force put being no choice," I take them when offered according to law, but always with a bad grace. One subsidy which especially gets my goat is that which provides for the erection of rural cottages to be let to farm-workers at a rent of three shillings per week exclusive of rates. To my mind such a policy shows little or no understanding of either the needs of the farm-worker, the farmer, the landlord, the rural community, or the farming industry. Moreover, combined with the Wages Board regulation that any farm cottage let to a worker must be reckoned at three shillings weekly, it creates a false rental value of certain rural cottages, and thus leads to no end of injustices and absurdities.

Here is how this absurd compulsory rent of three shillings for a farm cottage works out to-day. Take the case of three men, working on the same farm, doing the same work, and receiving the same wage as entered in the wages book at forty-three shillings per week. A lives in a farm cottage, a good one, which if it were not a farm cottage let to a farm-worker would readily fetch ten shillings weekly, its true market price in the district. A's real wage is therefore forty shillings plus a good cottage. B lives in a very second-rate farm cottage, of an outside market value of but five shillings weekly. B's real wage is therefore forty shillings weekly plus a poor cottage. C, poor fellow, cannot get a tied cottage and therefore rents a free non-farm good cottage for which he pays the correct market value of ten shillings weekly. C's real wage is therefore only thirty-three shillings weekly plus a good house. And all three are doing similar work on the same farm!

Not only are farm-workers dissatisfied at such an unfair method of reckoning wages, but, in common with landlords and farmers, they realize that such a policy causes their industry to lose caste in the eyes of the public. They do want better houses to live in; but, instead of houses subsidized to let at a ridiculously uneconomic rental, they want to work in an industry which can afford to pay them a cash wage high enough to enable them to pay, either the market price for a good cottage, or to enjoy the money difference in rental if they choose, or

owing to a temporary shortage of cottages, they are forced to live in a poor one. Moreover, the higher cash wages farming can pay the better for farming and the country-side. To keep cash wages low means to provide yet another burden of odium for farming to carry. To-day there is a lot of talk about a shortage of farm labour. The only way to ensure an adequate supply of first-quality labour on our farming land is for farmers to work for a policy which will enable them to offer cash wages equivalent to those offered by town industries.

Hitherto the general objection amongst farmers to any suggestion that farm cottages should be let at their full market value, and that their industry should be prosperous enough to raise wages to correspond, has been that this would mean an increased assessment for rates. Well, why not? As it is, the absurdly low rent of cottages occupied by farm workers means that the rural community is not receiving its proper due in rates. Surely farmers are members of the rural community?

V

What can or should one write concerning Armistice Day twenty years after the first, save that its celebrations still continue in both town and country? Some of the young may perhaps label those of us who partake in them as sentimentalists, but what of it? Without honest sentiment life becomes a dull, grey business. It is natural and right for youth to look ahead, but it is equally natural and right for age to argue that to forget the past would be as foolish as to ignore the future. Behind is custom, in front is adventure. And so in our several fashions we still celebrate Armistice Day.

Of course, rural celebrations must differ from those in town, for you cannot shut down a farm like you can an office, a shop, or a factory. The shepherd, the carter, the woodman, and most of the workers are scattered over the farm at eleven o'clock in the morning, so when November 11th falls on a week-day they parade in remembrance on the nearest Sunday.

Armistice Sunday in the country is such an intimate affair. One knows everybody. The officers and men of the British Legion, the members of the village band, the choir, and all the onlookers, most of whom are, more or less, regular companions the year through. Even so I often wonder what the youthful onlookers are thinking on Armistice Sunday, those young enough to have no real remembrance

of those tragic years 1914-1918. For the survivors of that struggle are now getting old, and it must be difficult for young folk to realize that Caleb Toomer, head dairyman at Elm Tree Farm, now rather tubby and grey-haired was once a dashing young sergeant. The sight of the medals across the broad chest of Shepherd Hardiman must amaze them. They see him plodding slowly home from the sheepfold every evening, looking every inch a shepherd, but not in the least like a soldier.

And what of those one-time soldiers themselves? Middle-aged civilians of all classes, holding widely differing political opinions, men of all shapes and sizes, somehow united in church on one Sunday in the year to remember their fallen companions, and in some measure to recapture the fellowship of their young manhood. Is it that on this one day every year they are reminded of what tragedies can befall mankind? Or is this martial parade perhaps a slight brag by middle-age that once it too was young? I always wonder.

For myself, the actual happenings on Armistice Day always impress the most. Such a little crowd of people at the village war memorial this morning. Apart from the schoolchildren perhaps only a bare handful of grown-ups. A short service was held, wreaths were laid at the foot of the memorial, and the two minutes' silence was religiously observed. Even at my desk this evening I can see it all so clearly. The November sun shining through a watery sky on to wet, glistening thatched roofs. The elms and poplars standing like sentinels while the breeze flutters their fallen leaves around the stationary cars. During that two minutes the main road is transformed into what it originally was, a part of the village to be used as the villagers dictate. Every one who passes that way just before eleven o' clock must halt for two minutes on Armistice Day.

I once saw the local hunt meet outside a village church, and the one remaining bit of rural pageantry pay homage to Armistice Day. Never shall I forget that. A grey Saxon church, a white-haired rector, some surpliced choir-boys, and thirty or forty riders in pink and black sitting motionless on their horses. Even the hounds seemed to understand that this was a special occasion. They clustered round the huntsman's horse, looking up anxiously into his face with their tongues lolling out, and during that two minutes forgot even to wave their sterns. Such a meet brings the heaviest cap of the season, destined, of course, for Earl Haig's Fund.

It is amazing the hold which Armistice Day still possesses. All over Britain this morning farm-workers set their watches by the church

clock, and even where no warning siren could be heard, work stopped at the appointed time. Somehow I always think that for one man to observe the two minutes' silence when he is quite alone is almost more impressive than when a huge crowd does so. A ploughing team motionless on the hill-side, with the ploughman standing at attention between the plough handles, perhaps thinking of those dangerous days when he had little hope of returning to the land which bred him. A tractor which ceases its mechanized stutter at the behest of Armistice Day. A silent, motionless shepherd alone with his flock in the middle of a root field. An ancient woodman standing motionless in a clearing with his billhook in his hand.

All these pictures of Armistice Day, in the country-side, together with those of the town gallery, were painted to-day once again. All this morning the sun shone through a mackerel sky; all this morning the buses thundered past the Cenotaph; all this morning Britain was busy until eleven o'clock when all Britain stopped to think for just two minutes. So, after twenty years, we still celebrate Armistice Day.

VI

Just now farming is faced with the rather absurd paradox of wheat offals being worth as much or more than wheat. This sort of thing always sets me thinking how opposed are the desires of town and country with regard to the prices of farm products. The farmer would exult in dear flour and cheap offals, but his town cousin prefers things the other way round. One thing is certain, and that is that bread has been far too cheap for long enough, at any rate so cheap that nearly every household in Britain wastes as much as it consumes. A glance into the hog-tub would surprise many farmers even, and I doubt whether 10 per cent. of housewives in this country, either in town or country, could tell their husbands the price of bread without referring to their baker's book. For most Britons bread to-day is such a minor item in the daily menu, and its price is so low that it is not worth bothering about.

But years ago it must have been a serious matter for the wage-earner, and whenever I drive through the village of Wishford in South Wiltshire I am reminded of this. Cut into the stone wall of the churchyard is a list of bread prices:

1800	.	.	.	.	.	3/4d. per gallon
1801	.	.	.	.	.	3/10d. per gallon
1904	.	.	.	.	.	10d. per gallon
1920	.	.	.	.	.	2/8d. per gallon

What a story is contained in that list of prices! The poverty of the labourer of the early years of the last century; the farming depression when the low level was reached; and later on the effect of the Great War on farming receipts. But what a pity it is that the differing levels of farm wages are not cut into the stone side by side with those bread prices. Then one would be able to read that true story that British farming has always been subsidized by somebody. That story would show that in the old days English farming was supported by the sweating of the labourer; that a century later it carried on by sweating capital, chiefly landlord's capital; and that somehow or other it worried through the abnormalities of the war period.

Even more remarkable would be the story told if the wages and bread prices of to-day were added to the list. Bread 1s. 7d. per gallon, and wages at about four times the 1904 level. Yet still farming in this country carries on, in recent years mainly by the sweating of the farmer's capital.

VII

I have only once attended a large coursing meeting, but I can remember coming away with the definite impression that either English hares are not as fast as they used to be, or that modern greyhounds are a dickens of a lot faster than their ancestors. I suggested this to an old farmer friend, who answered, "There's no difference in either of 'em. The trouble is that to-day they try to make coursing an attraction for a huge crowd. That fashion they must bring the hares to the crowd, which ain't fair. Fact o' it, it ain't real coursing at all. You take a couple o' greyhounds out for a walk over the downs by yourself, and they'll be hard put to it to catch a good hare in her natural country. That's coursing, that is. This job's just a raree show for a crowd."

My own view is that my friend has the rights of the matter, and modern coursing as practised before a huge crowd definitely does not attract me. However, it is responsible for one very good story, not perhaps exactly suitable for after dinner. At a coursing meeting the owner of the favourite, having laid heavily against his dog, gave it a

beefsteak just before it went into the slips. Alas, unfortunately for this clever crook his dog was sick just before the course; whereupon the competing dog immediately snaffled the result, and consequently lost the course. I know of no better illustration of

For 'tis the sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petard.

VIII

It seems to me that the less arable a farmer has, the more he hurries at every job in connection with it. His grass farming, save for haymaking, he handles slowly but surely, being quite content with Nature's speed; but he rushes his arable farming as though he disliked it. Perhaps it is that the man who once ploughed several hundred acres every year looks upon his remaining fifty acres of arable more as a necessary nuisance than as an important branch of his business. Anyway, one of my neighbours has recently dealt with his mangel field in a dickens of a hurry. One day it was a good crop of roots. A few days later the said roots were in a clamp, and horses and tractors were busy ploughing. Then, as soon as a few acres were turned over the broadcast was at work; and almost before I realized it, the whole field was sown to wheat.

When I chaffed him about this hustle, he admitted that his arable farming so got on his nerves that he just had to get shot of its worries as quickly as possible. This dislike of arable farming is, of course, because during recent years such farming has been a certain way of losing money. Indeed, over a large part of rural England, one basis of assessing farms has been for some time by the proportion of permanent pasture on each holding, on the lines that permanent pasture is possibly profitable land whereas arable is a certain loss. There is a story prevalent in rural districts that when one farmer, who was appealing against his rate assessment, was asked how much arable land there was on his holding, he replied, "I dunno. It's all bloody 'orrible."

IX

Up to date we have had no frost to speak about, which pleases me greatly, for as a result the grass continues to grow, so much so

that as yet we have not needed to feed one mote of our woefully short stock of hay to the cows. The other morning I pointed to the dairy herd grazing busily just over the garden wall, and said to my wife, "You don't often see that." "What?" she asked, "they look happy enough." "So they should," I answered, "they're eating spring grass in November."

Another thing which this mild November has brought is a lush wheat plant, almost winter-proud on many fields. Even so, I am rather worried about my own wheat field, as the land was gyro-tilled last August, and I am afraid that we have not got it down to a firm enough seed-bed. This, of course, means a danger of losing plant through frost later on. However, my foreman ridicules my fears, his argument being that during the preparation the tractor wheel must have travelled over every inch of the field. As he drove the tractor, and, during its early struggles behind the gyro-tiller, informed me that he was rapidly acquiring corns on his behind, he should be the better judge. Anyway, I hope so.

His description of that job was that on the rough ground the tractor bucked like a mule, but this evening a horse-dealer friend went one better in describing the antics of one of his recent purchases.

"I gits up on 'im," he said, "an' buck! I tell 'ee thic 'oss could buck. For ten minutes er moor 'ee wur buckin' like a radio."

Granted, he meant rodeo, but when I think of the howls and shrieks which my daughter coaxes from the family wireless in her eternal search around Europe for jazz at all hours, I admire the aptness of the word which he actually used in his comparison.

X

I was discussing foot-and-mouth disease with a friend to-day and discovered that he was convinced that we often imported this disease from the Continent in the straw packing used for goods and produce of all sorts. I do not know whether this is a fact or not, but I do know that Canada deals with the danger very definitely, and I wish that this country would copy her example. Canada will not allow any straw-packed goods to enter. Should anyone ship crockery or any goods to the country packed in straw, they are not permitted to land, but are sent back to the shipper, freight collect.

But then until very recently Canada has always been primarily an agricultural country, and has therefore been forced to consider the

well-being of her farming when framing legislation. Here cheap foreign goods for townsfolk have been considered far more important than the loss of good herds of cattle. What will happen in the future? Shall we copy Canada, or, now that her minerals and manufactures have become more important than her farming, will she copy us?

XI

At last I have managed to work in a day's cover shooting, the first this season. Thanks to the kindness of a neighbour I was therefore able to forget work and worry for a few hours, and to revel in country sport at its best and under ideal weather conditions. We were shooting the fatted pheasant, and anybody who thinks that semi-domestic bird to be an easy mark, when the guns are placed in a dip and he soars overhead some fifty yards up, has another guess coming.

One of the keepers informed me that I was "doin' well one side, but tarble late on 'em 'tother." Which was true, for I had a sore patch of ribs where my cigarette-case had dented them a few days before when I had descended from my horse unexpectedly, and, like most folk of fifteen stone, rather heavily.

In between drives this type of shooting gives one time to think of all sorts of things. To-day I found myself thinking of the job of beating, and of the increasing difficulty of getting a team to perform it. All my life this job has never been a very popular one amongst rural folk, not for any monetary reason, but because most of them considered it undignified. Many years ago before there was any unemployment pay it was looked upon as a job for those unfortunates or inefficients who were out of work, and the regular farm-worker scorned it.

Even in his lowly paid days the farm labourer was possessed of far more independence than most townsfolk imagine. I well remember the head keeper on the estate being short of beaters for an important three days' shoot, and asking my father, a tenant farmer like myself, who was one of his greatest friends, whether he could send half a dozens beaters to help out. Very tactfully—the old man knew his job—my father put this proposition up to the men on the farm. They discussed it amongst themselves, and then their spokesman said, "Well, zur, we doan' like the job, as you do well know. 'Owsomever, we'll do it fur you. But we bain't gwine to be put upon by they keepers."

The veiled scorn and animosity between the farm-worker and the keeper in those days were due to three reasons. One, because the keeper might prevent or punish the farm-workers habit of pocketing any edible game when the chance offered. Two, because the keeper earned more money per week. And three, the main reason of all, because the keeper was the servant of another man, while the farm-worker was the servant of the land.

The first has largely faded out to-day, because for various reasons the keeper has found that it pays best to look the other way. The third, too, is decidedly weaker, just why I do not know. But the second still obtains, and is to-day a more bitter grievance than of old. To-day the farm-worker quite rightly is beginning to question the system which values either footman, valet, keeper, or chauffeur, at a higher level than the ploughman, stockman, or farm craftsman of any kind.

However, things usually work their own cure, and to-day the shortage of beaters is usually made up by retired folk—policemen, butlers, Army pensioners, and all sorts of people who can do with the day's pay to augment their small incomes, and who also enjoy the sport. Having been in my time both beater and gun I can vouch that both are enjoyable, although it is perhaps difficult to discover much enjoyment in beating thick cover on a wet day.

XII

To-day I discovered that a Norfolk farming phrase has become current in my native Wilts. In the business of fattening live stock quickly the use of one morning's fast weekly has long been an accepted practice, and this morning a neighbour described this as giving the pigs a "Norfolk Sunday breakfast." He also informed me that, although this method has decided advantages in pig-fattening, it also has some dangers. The pigs do better with a regular weekly fast, but it makes them so spiteful that they fight furiously with each other. One result of their annoyance at missing a meal, allied to their but half-hidden cannibalistic tendencies is to make life rather dangerous for the underling in the sty, so dangerous that sometimes it has to be rescued from its companions lest worse befall.

My friend, who, as the Americans put it, goes in for pigs in a big way, told me great tales of the weekly weighing and recording of his fattening-stock, stating that sometimes a sty of pigs would gain almost nothing in weight one week and the following week put on up to

sixteen pounds live weight per head. I wish he could tell me how to lose sixteen pounds in a week, for, although I have long since ceased to support the potato-grower in my diet, I am still dangerously near the sixteen-stone mark.

However, he did tell me something which shows that the domestic pig of the twentieth century is still very near the wild state. To-day pigs kept out of doors will grip hazel bushes in their teeth, and shake them in order to bring down the nuts. This is a trick which must be inborn, handed down from the ancestral wild pig of centuries ago.

XIII

I have just discovered another illustration of the way in which townsfolk look upon farming. In one of the Sunday papers yesterday one honest man wrote the following letter:

"Out of all the boosted schemes for getting folk 'back to the land' none seems to make great headway, and I doubt if the most fervent sponsors of these schemes would, themselves, care to go and live on a small holding and try to wrest a living from the soil.

"Certain I am, that I and my mates, now working in factories which are subject to the strictest supervision by Government inspectors, earning jolly good wages, and with a 48-hour week, would not return to the life on the land which enslaved us many years ago before we migrated to this town.

"We have experienced 'both sides of the hurdle' and know which is best. All the 'land' we want to view is very nicely laid out in the town parks and public gardens."

It is refreshing to see such truth openly admitted, for that, I think, is a true statement of the attitude of a host of townsfolk to farming in this country or any other; but I would like to thank the writer of that letter for its final sentence. As I say, he must be an honest man. He wants to live and work in a town, occasionally to view a nice park or garden, and to eat the produce of the work of some poor fools who toil outside his town paradise, because, forsooth, they know no better. In other words, he considers that countryfolk are ignorant yokels who have been put into the world to turn the handle for clever townsfolk.

And the devil of it is that the progress of modern civilization during recent years seems to support that view.

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But see the townsman scuttle to the countryside, that land he says he never wants to see, when danger threatens. Also, how long would his precious town carry on, if the work of the country-side stopped?

XIV

To provide pheasants in sufficient quantity for a good day's cover-shooting is an expensive hobby. Years ago my father used to describe it like this: "Up goes a guinea. Bang goes a penny. And down comes half a crown." If that was true thirty years ago, I should imagine that the business is even more expensive to-day. The guinea must have reached nearly thirty shillings. The bang is about three-halfpence. And I doubt whether the half-crown return—of course, always supposing that the bang was successful—fetches more than three and sixpence to four shillings.

Of course, as a farmer, I know nothing about the actual cost of pheasant-rearing, my pheasant-shooting having been confined chiefly to accepting welcome invitations from friends and in my boyhood a little quiet poaching on misty days. This year, as ever, my pheasant-rearing friends have not failed me. Indeed, in one case the sport I was given was so good that I nearly overreached myself. Tacked on to the letter of invitation was the sentence, "Don't bother to bring a loader. We can fix you up."

Now that rather flummoxed me. Hitherto all my shooting had been confined to one gun, and that gun a legacy of ancient days, a gun which had been carried on a tractor, left at nights in a shepherd's house, a weapon which endured the rough and tumble of the average farmer's twelve bore. Obviously it would not pass muster in the company I should meet, and anyway I should soon have to get another. At first I decided to refuse the invitation, but the temptation to live like a millionaire for twenty-four hours proved too much. So I hired a pair of hammerless ejectors and travelled away to do or die.

In due course I went to the first stand, and there met my loader. He was a retired head keeper of nearly seventy, and as I said good morning I noticed that he was dressed much better than I was. Still, he looked nice and fatherly, and he had a twinkle in his eye. He loaded one gun, gave it to me, and then we came to it. "And which side, sir, do you wish me to hand you your second gun?" came in a gentle query from my rear.

And there I was, sitting like a Duke on a borrowed shooting-seat, not knowing what to answer. However, there was no help for it, so I confessed that I was but a farmer shot, that the two-gun job was entirely new to me, and asked for instruction. "Well," said my mentor, "ef you doan't mind what I do say, zur, be about tea-time I shall 'ave 'ee trained proper."

So we left it like that and waited. I was a wing gun, and the early birds went forward. But presently an old cock swung back, and round, and then straight over me. I heard "That'll be ourn, zur," from behind me, swung up, and down he came to the accompaniment of a growled "That'll do" from my companion. And thanks to that lucky beginning and his sound teaching I had a great day's sport. Even so, my farming upbringing tells me that I do better and enjoy myself more when using one gun and perhaps also when shooting back with the beaters.

XV

Why is it that whenever the eastern counties are mentioned most people immediately think of Norfolk? True, that county does contain a small acreage of flat fen and silt land, and some very good brick-earth districts, but just why it is always considered the king-pin of East Anglia defeats me. Many years ago, in the heyday of Turnip Coke of Holkham, it merited this position, but to-day I should feel inclined to award first place to Cambridgeshire for its gutty fen land. But I expect Norfolk will continue to hold it in the public mind for some years to come, for it still boasts the finest publicity of any county in England, just like wheat does of all our farming products. There will have to be a lot more farming teaching in towns before a more correct estimate of to-day's values is prevalent in either connection.

All of which is without doubt the result of a recent visit to the Isle of Ely, where the grain yields discussed by my hosts made me green with envy. They talked of ten quarters of wheat per acre from their flat fields, and I was obliged to confess that our south-country chalk rarely gives us more than five. It appeared from their conversation that 1938 had not given them anything like such heavy yields of either grain or sugar beet, as had 1937. Down south the grain yield was undoubtedly higher this season than it was last; which just shows the difference between different districts of this small island. Still, that good land's poor yield was even then greater than my home

county's good one. As I say, there was no doubt at all that I was now in a land of plenty, in spite of poor prices, lower yields, and all the other troubles to which any farming is heir.

Another surprise for me was to find that at least one of the wind-mills in this flat country-side still works. I had many times noticed these picturesque buildings when I had been travelling through the eastern counties either by car or by train, but always I had looked upon them as charming relics of a bygone industry. But a visit to Ingleboro Mill soon corrected this false impression. When I arrived the huge sails were still, and an internal combustion engine was driving the machinery. However, as soon as I suggested that these sails were now merely for ornament the miller gave orders to educate the ignorant southerner.

There was hardly a working wind going, but evidently enough to teach me a lesson. So the engine was stopped, and soon the sails began to move. I stood on the platform outside and watched them gyrating against a view of miles of good flat farming country. I thought of a film I had once seen in which Mr. Will Hay had clung to such sails, presumably for fun. I looked down at the drop beneath, felt giddy, and hastily retired inside.

There I saw the stones busily revolving by wind-power, and turning out a good sample of barley meal. I wondered what it felt like to be in the top of that mill when a good gale of wind was spinning those sails. I doubted whether many of our modern builders would relish the task of erecting a building to stand such a strain. I got covered with flour, and enjoyed myself immensely.

XVI

Having said so many unpleasant things about rabbits during recent years it seems only fair here to admit their two good points. The first is that they make useful presents—one can give a couple of rabbits where one cannot give a couple of shillings. The second is that on occasion rabbits provide good sport.

Christmas is drawing near, so I spent this morning helping the keeper with his rabbiting in the gorse on the top of the down. It was a frosty morning. The bushes and trees were covered with white lace; the poplars in the meadows showed up like black sentinels; and far beyond the everlasting finger of Salisbury spire pointed upwards

above the ground mist in the valley. On such a morning it does not matter whether rabbits bolt or not, but usually they do.

During three hours' good sport I could not help noticing how tidy and deft-fingered the keeper was. When I complimented him on it he said, "I allus reckon for to roll up the carpet as I do goo." Which means that after each burrow was finished the rabbits procured were neatly "harled" and hung up on a bush; the knife used was carefully wiped and pocketed; the line ferret was bagged, the line coiled ready for use; and the spade and other tackle carefully placed out of the way before the loose ferret was put into the next burrow. The man's movements might have appeared slow to any one not brought up to ferreting; but he never made an unnecessary one, and the result was both quickly and efficiently achieved.

I have noticed the same tidiness with the majority of rural workers, both in their work and especially in the eating of their meals in the open air; but I will confess that it was Kipling's short story *Friendly Brook*, which first brought it to my notice. The tidy deftness of a farm labourer while eating bread and cheese and raw onion with a pocket-knife has to be seen to be appreciated; and the untidy condition of the average dining-table after a meal enhances this tremendously.

XVII

To-day, Sunday, was so cold that I did not feel like putting my nose out of doors, but the thought of the needs of my dairy herd forced me to conquer my natural inclinations. A few days before wet and mud had driven the bail herd from the valley to the downs in search of drier lying, whereupon Nature's queer and sometimes malicious sense of humour had caused her to dry up nearly everything in sight, including some of the milk. Moreover, as yet we had fed no hay to the cows, and had been congratulating ourselves and the weather on prolonging the grazing season, we hoped, until after Christmas.

But to-day the weather was so cold and beastly that orders had to be given for more generous hand-feeding, so I drove up to the bail to settle the details. There I found my dairyman and his young and rather diminutive colleague as cheerful as crickets, milking cows on the top of a Wiltshire hill and surrounded by the coldest of east winds, which had a touch of north in it for flavouring. I gave them both

compliments and sympathy, and their charges an increased ration of cake plus hay, to everybody's great satisfaction. So here I must pay tribute to the cheerful service which most farmers obtain from their employees, even when the work has to be done during weather conditions which make the tasks anything but pleasant ones. Middle-aged, old, and young, it is amazing how cheerfully they face the discomfort which Nature serves out to them at certain times during the year.

Moreover, I must stress the inclusion of the young worker in this connection. I have no patience at all with those who are continually wailing that the younger generation is not a patch on the old. Possibly this view is coloured by the memory of the scathing remarks of my father concerning his sons; but, even so, I must admit that I find little fault in modern youth save that which can be traced to the door of its parents. If the children have been spoilt, the parents are usually to blame. Too often in these days one hears the adult criticizing youth not only for its lack of efficiency in work but also for its lack of guts in play. Well, my younger employees give the lie to both charges, and the other day a young man showed me that the modern boy is just as daft in his pleasure as his father was, perhaps more so.

He drove sixty miles to my house, arriving about tea-time. That evening he motored with my household another twenty to a hunt ball, at which he danced from ten p.m. until something after three a.m. Home again, he changed into hunting kit, had a breakfast, and set off to drive nearly two hundred miles to where a hunter would be waiting for him at eleven that same morning. And soon after midday we got a wire to the effect that he had arrived to time quite safely. I should imagine that he slept late on the following morning.

I agree that the whole business was rather silly, but who of us older folk did not perpetrate just as foolish pranks in our salad days? Anyway, his performance assured me that modern youth does not lack guts, for which heaven be praised. For, to quote my aged dairy-man, "You kin do anythin, wi' a colt as'll goo. 'Tis when they wun't goo at all that you be done like."

XVIII

The recent cold weather has reminded me of something which I discovered in Cambridgeshire a few weeks back. On one farm I was shown a cowhouse, with a loft above which boasted a slatted floor

and a partially glass roof. In the loft the farmer stored his seed potatoes in boxes for sprouting, before sowing. Incidentally he called this process "chitting," and down in the south-west of England we call it "chimpling." The plan was evidently to use the heat of the cattle below to keep the potatoes safe from winter frosts, and to aid the chitting process, and to my untutored eye it seems to be a good one. Anyway, it works, and now boasts the certificate of several years of success.

In a way it reminded me of the Western Canadian method of housing pigs and poultry during the winter months. There the cold is so intense that any hen which gets left outside at night to roost, gets her feet frozen. So we used to cram the sties with pigs, and let the poultry roost above them for warmth. Incidentally, in one such sty I remember seeing the hens roosting on bare poles just above the pigs, so that any hen which fell off went into the pig ration, and came out ultimately as bacon.

This morning, after sleeping at Banbury, I set off in my car for home immediately after breakfast. But soon after leaving Banbury a car passed me containing a pink coat, so I stopped to ask the next roadman where the local hounds were meeting. He advised me to ask at Burford, and there a genial policeman put me on the scent. Subsequently I arrived at Westwell for a meet of the Heythrop. I grant that I felt rather out of place, for my town overcoat and black felt hat hardly matched my surroundings or my neighbours. Still, who cares? I thought. So I got out of my car and proceeded to inspect hounds with what I trust was recognized as a knowledgeable eye.

Then, a few minutes later, I was indeed lucky. I watched them draw a piece of kale near by, viewed the fox away, and then saw the field charging a stone wall in great style. After which I spent two hours' fun dashing up and down strange roads until work dragged me away. Incidentally, the Cotswolds are incorrectly named; they should be called the "Wot's cold," for to-day they were as cold as charity.

XIX

Christmas has come and gone, thank goodness, and so has 1938—again thank goodness. I say the former because the weather during Christmas put a stop to all my plans for the holiday. By careful

wangling I had arranged for a clear week, which should comprise two days' hunting, one day's shooting, and also a little golf. Snow and ice put paid to the lot, and on the first day when it was safe to take a horse out, I had to start work again. So, late at night, when all my household are in bed, I find myself toiling at my desk until after midnight in order that I can go hunting to-morrow, the first chance since before Christmas. I rang up the kennels early this evening to get this confirmed, and was told that although there were still many snowdrifts left, hounds were to leave at the appointed time next day. And now the welcome sound of rain pattering on the window tells me that they will.

I should imagine that most farmers are like myself, glad to see the back of 1938. It was a bad year for weather, a bad one for prices, and a worse than usual one politically, if such a thing be possible. Still, one should be thankful for one's blessings, and remember the woes of others, and in that connection one of my neighbours has my deepest sympathy, for two days before Christmas he told me that he still had ten acres of sugar beet unlifted. 'That in itself is bad enough, but apparently there seems to be grave doubt as to whether he will be able now to find a factory to take it.

Prior to the frost the wet had brought its trouble to this crop. The beet came up so dirty, that the carriage on the tare ran way with any hope of profit. I heard of one truck-load which had a tare of over sixty per cent. And of a query to the farmer as to whether he expected the sugar factory to pay tithe on the portion of his farm which he had sent in.

XX

This New Year it is a treat to see a green country-side once again. Snow may bring a pretty country scene, but a Christmas-card country-side pleases few farmers. Work on the land ceases, and work with the stock increases and becomes very much more expensive. The hay-cart was high busy the other weeks in the snow, and not all the tumbles were taken by people who were enjoying themselves by tobogganning or skating.

During the Christmas frost one of my very good neighbours called on me one morning, and he did look a tough, in a disreputable overcoat and gum boots covered with sacking. When I remarked on the splendour of his attire he said with feeling, "When you've fallen down

as many times as I have in the last few days you'd wear anything for safety. I'm getting too old for such capers."

So to cheer him up I told him the story of the rather merry farmer who slipped down on an icy road, while carrying home a flask of the right stuff in his hip-pocket. When he came to, he felt around his rear to find it wet. Cautiously he tasted his finger, and murmured, "Thank God, 'tis blood."

To which he replied that he didn't want blood, so we went indoors and helped the barley grower a trifle.

XXI

If frost brings its troubles, so does the subsequent thaw; at least, such is the experience of a water-keeper friend. He had carefully netted off a stretch of side stream as a spawning bed for trout, and stocked it with fish. He reckoned that he had put the wire-netting sufficiently high to enclose his fish even during winter flood level. Alas, he had omitted to allow for a sudden influx of snow water, with the result that now more than half his fish have escaped over the top of the barrier. Which just shows that country operations must always have a wide margin of safety to allow for the vagaries of the weather.

Another thing which the thaw has shown up in this chalk country is that quite a lot of the wheat on the hills did not stand the frost too well. I have noticed several fields, my own amongst them, during the last day or two where the plant looks far from happy, and where a large percentage of it seems to have suddenly disappeared. This is most noticeable where the seed-bed was a fine one. Which proves once again that the old lore of our forefathers was correct—"Rough for winter corn, fine for spring sown."

However, one must be fair, and mention one instance of the frost doing some good to farming. For some months I have been keeping my eye on a pasture field belonging to a neighbour. Last July he gave this a heavy dressing of our native chalk, most of this being in lumps as big as my head. His steers grazed amongst them, and from a distance all last autumn the field looked as though it were covered with a flock of seagulls.

The occasional light autumn frosts did crack those lumps a little, but the recent hard frost has done the job properly. That field has just been chain-harrowed, and the result is little short of miraculous. All the lumps have shattered down, and that field is now dressed with

powdered chalk. I must say that I shall be interested to see the result of this dressing, as the soil is greensand, and it must be many years since it had any lime applied to it.

But while most of the open fields are now clear of snow, on the north side of the slopes it still shows in white streaks on the green, while many of the lanes and ox-droves contain so many drifts that they are almost impassable for wheeled traffic, horseback being the only sure way to travel them. On my way to the meet this morning I found that to be a series of slides and plunges, but one of my neighbours managed to batter his way through drifts and mud in a motor-car. Like most farmers he is no respecter of cars. On the contrary he looks upon his car as an agricultural implement. When weather conditions are favourable it does a rather better job of work, but when they are unfavourable it must do some sort of job somehow. The town critic who considers the farmer's car to be an unneeded luxury should have watched its passage through rural Britain during the last fortnight.

XXII

That the history of British farming is a continuous series of innovations is a fairly well-known truth, yet all down the ages farmers themselves have never tired of the topic of the great changes which have taken place in their industry during their lifetime. Farmers are more prone than most folk to talk shop, and this morning a neighbour and I were once again pursuing that well-worn theme. Somehow we came to the conclusion that in our own district Wiltshire farming had not changed half as much as we had at first thought.

We harked back to the pre-war days of the Hampshire Down breeding-flock and the four-course arable rotation; and mourned the passing of the spacious stability which that excellent system had bestowed upon our ancestors. We spoke of its partial break-up under war-time conditions, and of its total collapse as soon as peace had ruled the country long enough for full bellies to make townsfolk forget war-time hunger, and so enable town politicians once again to sacrifice farming on the altar of industrialism and export trade.

From this national tragedy we came to the many expedients and new methods by which farmers had endeavoured still to farm, and the change in Wiltshire farming seemed tremendous. First the discarding of the arable sheep, and, in many cases, the subsequent futile

attempts continuously to grow grain on thin chalk soil without these preservers of fertility. Next, the sense knocked into our thick heads by the law of diminishing returns and the subsequent return to live stock, but this time to cows and pigs and poultry.

We metaphorically patted the Wiltshire farmer on the back for discovering a way of carrying on despite falling prices, and congratulated ourselves on our own and our neighbours' cleverness; and then it suddenly dawned on us that, with all our cleverness, all our new methods, and all our scientific and mechanical equipment, we were merely doing just what our ancestors had done on the ups and downs of downland.

Instead of folding sheep upon the arable, we had merely grassed that arable down to temporary leys, were folding cows and pigs and poultry over it, and in due course cashing the fertility so gathered in terms of grain. We were using different live stock, new systems of managing them, and all sorts of gadgets to help; but in essentials we were practising the same sound system of farming as that of a century before, in other words, crop, stock, manure, soil.

"And so the music of farming goes round and round," most farmers giving thanks that, whatever man may do, it does not stop.

XXIII

During my walk this morning I visited the dry cows, fifteen of them. I do not think that there is any more pleasing sight to a dairy farmer than a bunch of useful springers; and especially in the dead time of year when the country-side looks so barren, and in contrast their wealth of promise is so especially satisfying.

One had calved during the night; another calved as I opened the gate into the field; half a dozen had evidently only a week or so to go, and the others looked blooming, which gave me great satisfaction, for they were all second-calvers, and my experience has usually been that the second-calver has a nasty habit of coming in a trifle too early and showing promise of a rather indifferent milk yield.

However, this winter those second-calvers which have come in, came in to time, and are milking well, and the others look like following suit. Their well-being, since the frost and snow put paid to any more grazing, has been in the hands of Jim the drowner, who spent a sort of maternity Christmas, for eight calves made their bow during the

holidays. When I sympathized with him over this unfortunate timing on their part, he grinned, and remarked, "I tell 'ee wot 'tis. I be nothin' but a distric' nuss."

I found him attending to the latest arrival this morning, and, after some grave discussion of farming matters, informed him that I was under orders to take back a hare for the family larder. "And it's a bit bleak, Jim. No cover anywhere. What about it?"

"Gwaine up top to the bail?"

"Yes, Charlie wants to see me about some repairs."

"Right. When you be done wi' Charlie, you wants to goo back droo the middle o' Stone's Edge, curl down below the rezevoy"—meaning reservoir—"and then come down 'ill atheert the aighteen acres, an' straight awver thic lynch. The wind's jist right. Thee't vind 'er zittin' there. That is, if narn o' they poachin' dogs ain't bin up along."

In due course I followed his directions, and took a good hare indoors as a result. As I carried it home I remembered a lovely remark made by an old Wiltshire farmer, who had been asked by his shooting tenant to grow some winter roots up at the top end of his farm in order to attract the hares.

"H'm!" he said. "Hares be all very well, but I ain't niver seen no hares go to Marlborough Fair."

XXIV

How true it is that one's education never ceases while one is alive, and how equally true that one learns new things in all sorts of unexpected places. To me the New Year always marks a definite intensity in my private and personal war with rabbits, so that the other day I went up into the huge wood at the top of my farm to acquire some reinforcements in the shape of ferrets.

I made the necessary purchase from one of my keeper friends, but as I stood chatting with him I noticed about a dozen huge motor-tyres in a pile near his wood-shed. The pneumatic tyre has been a familiar object in farming for many years now, but for the life of me I could not think just how they fitted into a keeper's job, so asked to be enlightened.

He told me that they made splendid water-troughs for his birds during the rearing season, and showed me several tyres which he had cut into two, by slicing through the middle of the tread all the way

round. The result was a pair of circular water-troughs; which, he told me, could be packed into small compass, did their job admirably, and were both easily transported and unbreakable.

On my way home I stopped to have a good look at my thirty acres of wheat on gyro-tilled land. I am very much afraid that half that field has gone. On the lower end where it was sheltered from the wind, the plant is good, but on the upper portion most of it seems to have vanished with the snow. I suppose that it was those two or three days of severe frost before the snow fell which are responsible for the damage. Until then the wheat had been revelling in abnormally mild weather, and never had a chance to become acclimatized to frost, so that sudden lowering of temperature just before Christmas put paid to a lot of it.

Since then I have noticed similar cases in the surrounding district. In the valleys the wheat looks fine, but on the unsheltered hills there seems hardly enough plant left for a crop. However, one of my old Wiltshire friends tells me to have faith, and that by April I shall be surprised at the transformation scene. I doubt it.

XXV

Once again I find myself on the side of a very unpopular minority. Quite frankly, I am against the practice of holidays with pay, not because I do not want people to have holidays, but because I think this method to be wrong in principle. In my view, holidays, no matter what one's station in life may be, are luxuries, and should be considered as such. What I mean is that everybody should take what holidays he or she can afford, an opinion which, of course, is coloured by the fact that such have been the only holidays which have ever come my way.

Let me put a hypothetical case. A earns £264 per annum, paid in twelve monthly payments of £22 each, and is allowed one month's holiday in each year at full pay. B is paid at the rate of £24 per month, compelled to take a month's holiday and to lose one month's pay. The financial and holiday results per annum are identical in each case, but the difference is that B realises that his holiday has cost him £24, a fact which must make him value both his holiday and his job at their proper worth, and must therefore tend to make him a higher type man than A.

Here it should be noted that neither A nor B expects a butcher to give him a free joint once a year, but expects to obtain only the

goods which he orders and pays for. The compulsion to take an annual holiday in B's case may savour of tyranny, but is necessary to counter the argument that if B knew he had to lose pay during holidays he would not take any and thereby become less efficient at his job.

To my mind there is no question that B's method of pay and holidays is the better one, but I cannot see it becoming practical politics for many years to come. Meantime, while the accepted method of holidays for wage-earners remains on the holidays with full pay basis, I cannot see any reason for farmers trying to withhold this boon from such a worth-while employee as the British agricultural labourer. For some years now on this farm we have managed to work in a week's holiday in rotation for everybody, a practice which I am convinced has had nothing but a beneficial effect on the farm as a whole.

To those who might retort that my income is not solely derived from farming I would suggest that farming in this country will never find prosperity or good-quality labour by stinting its employees. I well know that for some time now a considerable proportion of farm wages have been paid out of farming capital, but I would stress that for farmers to demand ability to pay their employees on all fours with town industries is a better business and political cry than to fight any proposed betterment of their standard of living.

For I am very conscious that to-day the farmer has not got the sympathy of the general public, and that his employees have. It is probably a legacy handed down from the hungry forties, but it is nevertheless true that a considerable number of townsfolk—farming's political rulers—still look upon the British farmer as a profiteering capitalist who robs the consumer and tyrannizes over and sweats his employees. The point that this is untrue is immaterial; the point that so many townsfolk believe it to be true is very, very material indeed. This being so, any attempt to keep the farm-worker down will not succeed in getting the farmer up. Indeed, on the contrary.

XXVI

While frost has ruled the farm I have been busy ferreting. When one is young, at least under twenty, this game does perhaps come under the headings of sport and pleasure; but when any farmer has come to years of discretion and disappointment, ferreting soon becomes merely another job of work. The jolly party of half a dozen guns, three or four keepers, and a good lunch may produce lots of fun, but very

definitely it is not the best nor the cheapest way to reduce the rabbit population by means of ferrets.

The proportion of burrows where even as many as two guns are necessary for efficiency is very small, and generally speaking one gun is the best method. For one thing this means no talking, and for another much better shooting, for the average rabbit gives little time to wait for guests to have the first shot. When you do wait for the sake of good manners, more often than not the rabbit gets hit behind, and subsequently has to be dug out.

For some years now I have found the best ferreting team to be three loose ferrets, one good line ferret, half a dozen purse nets, one man with a spade, and another with a gun. One loose ferret is carefully and quietly put into a burrow, while the gun stands quietly downwind. When the bolting rabbits come to an end, the gun creeps on to the next burrow with another loose ferret, leaving the spade and nets to tidy up behind him, and pick up the loose ferret. A bit of bread and cheese in one's pocket, which can be eaten without stopping the work, is all the extra equipment that is needed to produce a good bag.

In this fashion I have often come home with over fifty rabbits as a result of a day's work, and once, single-handed and doing my own digging, I mustered thirty-seven. I do not suggest that these are record bags for one gun, but I do suggest that they beat the bag per gun of most ferreting parties.

XXVII

During recent years British farmers have been suffering steadily increasing losses from theft. Poultry and sheep seem to be the most attractive booty to the thief, but just recently I have come across cases of pigs and harness being stolen from farms in my own district. That this increase in thievery is due to the coming of the motor-car is beyond question, but to use a car as a means of stealing cart-horse harness savours of adding insult to injury. Presumably the police will soon put a stop to this practice, but its recent increase bids fair to have an effect on rural housing.

I learned this while yarning to a neighbour this evening. He farms about four hundred acres, and specializes on two things—eggs and milk, both being produced by outdoor methods, folding poultry houses and bail dairying. He is a curious bird, in that every now and again he conceives some crack-brained idea—at least, crack-brained to his farming

friends when they first hear of it—but which in due time is copied by quite a number of them after the originator has proved its usefulness. On this occasion he excelled himself.

Somehow or other we got on the subject of farm cottages, whereupon he said firmly that in many cases caravans would be of more use to farming than fixed dwellings. In support he insisted that the land around his steading which could be overlooked from the windows of his farmhouse and cottages was for this reason worth twice as much per acre as the land which was out of sight.

Up to a point this difference in value must be admitted, for the more any farming is under the eye of both master and man the better; primarily, I suppose, because, unlike a town business, farming never stops. But one of the main reasons my friend gave was that in these days it was hopeless to put poultry on land not so overlooked, because both fowls and eggs would be stolen.

Apparently, he had suffered from this sort of thing, which just shows how history repeats itself. For many years the sheep-stealer has been extinct in this country, but modern transport would seem to have brought him back in the guise of poultry-lifter using the motor-lorry to convey his spoils. I myself have had no losses of this character, but apparently farmers whose holdings lie near a main road are not always so fortunate. There seems to be no end to the sins of the internal combustion engine.

XXVIII

Townfolk seem still to be worrying over a possible war famine, so it is to be hoped that they realize that the whole question of soil fertility, in other words ability to produce grain, depends on an adequate live-stock population. At long last even mechanized grain-growers and mainly live-stock farmers in this country have travelled half-way towards this common meeting-point. The former now admit that good grain growing depends on good stock farming, while the latter readily concede that it is necessary in the national interest in every way that most of our farms should regularly grow a proportion of grain, thus keeping an adequate staff of trained men and necessary implements should the necessity arise suddenly to expand our grain acreage at a time of national need.

But to-day it is essential for any British Government to realize two things. Firstly, that the grain-growing possibilities of our farming acres

depend in very great measure—I was tempted to write almost entirely—on the number of farm live-stock which those same acres will carry. Secondly, that unless the business of live-stock farming in this country, with its manifold attendant worries, is made profitably attractive, farmers won't do it; thereby reducing the defence value of our agricultural land.

A lifetime of farming in this country has convinced me that the correct approach to most rural problems is the oblique rather than the direct. For instance, when an M.F.H. wants the keeper of a keen shooting man to provide a sufficiency of foxes in the coverts under his control, does he ask directly for such a favour? Not he. During bluebell time he drives through the wood with his family, and accidentally on purpose meets the keeper. He then proceeds to talk pheasants hard and continuously. In fact his whole conversation seems to show that pheasants are his life's study, and that foxes have no place in it whatsoever. After a sufficiency of this sort of thing, in sheer desperation the keeper will volunteer that in addition to providing his employer with a plethora of pheasants he will personally see to it that a straight-necked fox will be found in his coverts the following winter. Whereupon the M.F.H. departs, having achieved his object without once mentioning it.

It is the same with this business of ensuring the maximum grain-growing capabilities of our agricultural land. To grow the maximum amount of cereals during peace must mean a greatly lowered yield during war. But to insist on a well-stocked flourishing country-side during peace would be to provide a welcome credit account of soil fertility on which the nation could draw heavily in terms of cereal crops in time of need. This very necessary state of things will come to pass only when live-stock farming is made sufficiently attractive to those engaged in it.

XXIX

One result of the rapidly increasing mechanization of our farming here is that it tends to turn farming into a "casual labour" industry. The permanent staff necessary on a farm becomes smaller and smaller, while at certain seasons of planting and harvesting—principally, of course, in arable districts—a large supply of casual labour is required.

I have heard it suggested that the introduction of unemployment insurance among farm-workers is also responsible for this change. I have no personal experience of this as I am in a district where the

farming is largely live-stock, which means that there is no tendency to lay off men during the winter months; and, even in an arable district, I hardly think that such is a general practice.

But there is no shadow of doubt that mechanization in farming and the heavy industries during the last few years has meant a diminution of labour employed. All over the world this has happened, and has been accompanied by a great increase in the number of people employed in manufacturing and services. Yet this drop in farm-workers has, in most countries, meant an increased volume of agricultural production.

This, apparently, is one of the great difficulties to be overcome in settling the present refugee problem. The old idea that refugees could all become farmers is absurd, as in a modern community only 8 per cent. are required to produce the necessary agricultural produce for all. Moreover, if search were made for the least remunerative and most fluctuating business in the whole world, the choice would be bound to fall upon agriculture.

Crop farming in the future will, no doubt, soon become a whole-time job for a few mechanics, aided by gangs of casual labour at certain rush periods. Live-stock, then, would seem to be the last stronghold of the farm-worker. It will be difficult to mechanize the lambing-pen, and it should never be forgotten that the tractor exhaust without muck soon spells soil exhaustion.

XXX

To any farmer the proposal to put unemployed townsfolk on to the land raises two questions. Firstly, is it fair to use the land in this fashion, as a receptacle for people who are surplus to town requirements? Secondly, will such people be able to make a success of life in such an unfamiliar setting?

Here is how the countryman looks at the first query. He realizes that farming is run like all other businesses in this country, under the capitalist system, and, moreover, that during recent years it has been hard put to it to find a profitable market for its produce. Consequently he argues like this: "If the State finances the work of a lot more people in farming there will bound to be increased production from the land as a result. This will still further depress the prices which I receive for my produce. Why should townsfolk come and run small holdings with State capital to compete with me, who has invested my own capital

in farming? Until the State sees fit to make my business prosperous I'm blown if I want the State to finance my competitors."

And there you have the reason, and, I think, a just reason, why farming-folk generally look with disfavour and even animosity on any State schemes to put unemployed townsfolk on the land. The only way in which that can be removed is for the State first to guarantee a profitable market for a greatly increased home production. Then there would be no need for schemes to put people on the land; instead there would most likely need to be a scheme to keep them away.

However, now that the nation generally has waked up to the fact that its home farming may any day be called upon to play its part as the fourth line of defence, it looks as though increased production from our farming acres may be worth the producer's while. If such comes to pass the countryman's natural objection to schemes for financing more food-producers will largely disappear. Under such conditions what proportion of unemployed townsfolk will be able to make a success of life in such an unfamiliar setting? Here I can say with confidence—"A far greater proportion than most people imagine." I know that during recent years we have become largely a nation of town-dwellers, but we are still a nation of country-lovers. It is in the word "lovers" that the key to success in rural life is to be found. Land is not merely something material to be exploited for man's benefit. It is alive, a mistress to be both served and loved, a mother who is anxious to cherish and reward her children. Two essential things the new-comer to the country-side must be willing to admit. Firstly, that he is a tyro, and therefore in the beginning of his career not worth very much. The factory- or office-worker would laugh if it were suggested that a farm-worker could do his job at a minute's notice. For their information the farm-worker laughs just as heartily when the opposite is suggested. Moreover, the new-comer must face the finances of the business—that to-day the British nation values a skilled farm-worker, a stockman with years of experience, at about two pounds weekly with a rent-free cottage, and that the tyro cannot be worth that amount.

The second essential is that the new-comer must be prepared, either as farmer, small holder, or farm-workman, to relinquish in some measure the town money-standard of living, and to be content with what the country-side has to offer. This is the most important thing of all. No matter whether you be large farmer, small holder, small farmer, or farm-worker, if you expect to obtain from your rural existence all the good things of the town in addition to all the good things of the country-side you just won't get them, and you will be miserable in consequence.

It is too much to ask of the land. But if the unemployed townsman is willing to say good-bye to some familiar town delights in exchange for some country ones, there is no reason at all why he should not succeed and enjoy his new life.

I have seen a London typewriter mechanic leave town at the age of thirty, and go with his wife and children to a farm cottage in Wessex. In six months he was a first-class dairymaid, and I know that he has never regretted the move. But he was content with what the countryside has to offer. He was willing to exchange the pavement joys of bright lights and crowds for those of the open air, the rolling downs, and the rabbit burrow. A young city accountant learned on my farm in a month to run a milking machine and to milk sixty cows twice daily with the help of a boy of fourteen. Again, he was content with rural joys, and spent his weekly half-day in following hounds on foot, or in trying to hit pigeons on the wing.

With that qualification of being content with what the countryside has to offer, I say frankly that there is no reason at all why the towniest of townsfolk cannot make a success of country life. The land is here, it needs—indeed it is crying out for—better care and attention; but, without a profitable market for a greatly increased production, national schemes to establish unemployed people on the land of this country must and will fail. Confidence in farming as a business proposition is the best and only fertilizer which can make them succeed.

XXXI

I have enjoyed this Sunday. January, whatever the weather, still spells lambing-time to the majority of farmers—perhaps I should have written heroes—who keep a Hampshire Down breeding-flock. Which was undoubtedly the reason why, during a check out hunting the other morning, I asked a neighbour what sort of luck was happening in the lambing-pens of 1939. To my great satisfaction he not only informed me that up to date things had been going extraordinarily well, but also invited me to come down one day and see for myself. A chance like that was not to be missed, for his flock is a household word in the Hampshire Down world.

The question was when? My friend very obligingly left me to choose my own time, but other engagements meant that my only free day for weeks was the following Sunday. So I agreed to ride through

the wood that morning for some six or seven miles and meet him somewhere near the fold.

Of course, I should have known better than to set out on a horse this morning, for I had seen the red sky, and knew well what it foretold. But I had just spent two days in town, and my liver needed a good shake, so I stuck to my original plan, and rode off soon after ten a.m., and, like a fool, without a mackintosh. When I was too far on my journey to make it worth while to turn back the rain started, so I hustled along the ox-drove, hoping that I should be able to borrow a coat of some kind at the other end. The rain got worse and worse, so I was very relieved to see my friend's car when I rode out into the open country at the top of his farm.

By this time the rain was fairly pelting down, so I put my horse in the field buildings, and sought sanctuary with my friend, his wife, and a spaniel inside the car. We drove westwards along the main road to a point above the farm, where he drove the car off the road, and produced a drink. Some folk might criticize such conduct on a Sunday morning, perhaps, but I could find no fault with it whatsoever, for it was a brute of a day. Still, I could not help thinking that most townsfolk would have thought that particular setting a rather queer one for the morning sherry.

The rain beat down on the car, and the whole country-side was dripping around us, while we discussed sheep and farming flavoured with sherry. My friend's flock still holds its proud place not only in the show ring but also in the export trade. And what a record up to date! Eighty-one champions, and nearly seven hundred prizes at the leading shows. Inquiries still come from all over the world, and the sheep bred on those chalk hills still find their way into far-off countries. I was told of a customer who sends orders for rams from Chile, of all places; but, when I suggested that this gentleman used them for crossing purposes, I was informed that he kept a pure-bred flock of Hampshires.

I have never been to Chile, and so for the life of me I could not visualize that flock overseas. I wondered all sorts of things. Whether they built a Wiltshire lambing-pen over there? Did they grow roots? Was the shepherd imported from England, and now both learning a new language, and teaching the natives to say "thic" and "I 'low"? If not, how did our Wiltshire sheep cotton to, perhaps, a Spanish or Chilean shepherd? The more I pondered the more fascinating the problem seemed, but I was soon recalled to the business in hand by a remark from my host that the rain was not quite so heavy. So we

left his lady to her knitting, and plodded off downhill across a field of winter barley.

The pen just below was evidently a good two miles from the farm buildings, but, as my companion said, "If you don't fold sheep and make some dung on this thin top land, well, you just can't grow anything." There was no doubt that this was a case of *experientia docet*, not *stultos*, but a wise countryman.

As we neared the pen I recollected that it was over twenty years since I had had any intimate dealings with Hampshire Downs, and I felt rather afraid that I might be weighed in the shepherd's balance and found wanting. Hampshire Down shepherds do not suffer fools any too gladly. However, my friend informed me that the head shepherd had many years ago been shepherd for one of my immediate neighbours, so I plucked up my courage for the ordeal to come.

Now a farmer may, like me, have given up sheep for twenty years, but if he has once lambed down a Hampshire Down flock, the moment he puts his foot into a lambing-pen it all comes back. The smell of the sheep, the feel of the litter under one's feet, the coops filled with the latest arrivals, the early lambs and their mothers out forward, the creeps whereby the lambs get access to something special in the way of food, the steady, well-planned, unhurried haste everywhere, and, of course, the rain.

This particular lambing-pen must have covered nearly two acres, for, having to deal with a ram-breeding flock of over six hundred ewes in many sections, ample space was essential. The two-teethed ewes and their lambs were in one lot, the twins in another, and the ram lambs had their special fold, which meant that the ewe lambs occupied yet another. In addition there were small folds for each lot to hold the young lambs and their mothers for a few days after being 'turned out of coop until they were ready to join the main body.

I did not think that the head shepherd would remember me, but when I suggested this, he said, "Ees I do. Over on 'tother hill a while back." So for old acquaintance' sake he made me free of his lambing-pen, showed me everything, and bore my, I hope, knowledgeable remarks without any obvious scorn. For which courtesy I was very grateful, and spoke my thanks aloud. He is now wearing to seventy, but still does his every other twenty-four hours' duty in the pen.

But there was no doubt whatsoever of two things. Firstly, that this flock still keeps true to type. Mothers and lambs were, to my untutored eyes, as alike as peas in a pod, and the good coats which I remembered when buying rams from my friend's late father some

twenty-five years ago were still everywhere in evidence. Secondly, that lambing luck was good, very good. About four hundred ewes had lambed, and twins were already over the ninety mark. Moreover, even I could see that the lambs were healthy and doing well. Which is surprising considering that I should doubt whether their mothers ever had a dry back this year.

Before I said good-bye I had not only thanked both the shepherd and his employer for a most enjoyable morning in spite of the rain, but also complimented the latter on two things—a pedigree lambing-flock in tip-top condition, and a cheerful shepherd in charge of them. The latter is very rare.

SPRING

I

I MUST confess that at the moment I am a trifle disappointed with some of my friends and neighbours. To-day, the last day of January to be exact, was so lovely that I went for a long lazy ride over my farm and the surrounding country-side, and without exception everybody I met remarked on the glory of the morning, and added, "It's just like spring." Being Wiltshire born most of them said "jist" instead of "just," and the majority made gloomy prophecies to the effect that later on we should suffer for such unseasonable weather.

I prefer the dialect rendering, and I have no cause to doubt the truth of their pessimistic forecasts, but I do deprecate the suggestion that spring must come at a certain date in the man-made calendar. Just when, forsooth, is spring, or, perhaps more grammatically, when should spring be? True, my encyclopædia informs me that in these parts spring arrives with the vernal equinox, about March 20th, and gives place to summer at the solstice on June 21st. Such rigid boundaries may be all very well for townsfolk, but surely those of us who live year after year in intimate contact with the bounty of the four seasons should know that spring comes sometimes early and sometimes late, sometimes for a short visit and sometimes for a long stay. We, of all people, should have said to-day, not, "It's jist like spring," but, "Nice to greet spring again, isn't it?"

For years on my farm we dated spring by the appearance of Tubby Bell, a local worthy who had reached his allotted span several years ago, and who, for thirty years or so, was to me and my neighbours the herald of spring. As I absorbed the legend in my boyhood, one winter Tubby was taken ill, a serious calamity for a working man in the days when there was no health insurance money to keep the pot boiling. However, the bounty of his employer and the kindness and charity of friends and wellmeaning neighbours enabled Tubby to enjoy his illness tremendously. During this halcyon period of his existence he became even more Tubby, and, moreover, according to local gossip, less inclined to work. One or two harsh critics near by swore that there was nothing the matter with him save laziness, but Tubby ignored such jealous gibes, and stayed warm and cosy in the innermost fastnesses of his thatched

cottage all the winter. Then, one fine day in the spring, Tubby suddenly appeared at the door of his cottage, and sat on a chair blinking at the warm sunshine. Spring had brought on convalescence.

All through the summer Tubby's health improved slowly, but not sufficiently to warrant his returning to work. Why should he work, and perhaps do some other poor fellow out of a job, when from divers charitable sources sufficient maintenance was forthcoming? But when in early October winter first blew his frosty breath on the little windows of his house, Tubby had a relapse, and retired indoors to bed. For months he hibernated, and not until spring returned once more to gladden the country-side did Tubby appear in his chair at the door of his cottage.

This procedure became a legend as the years passed, and I can remember as a schoolboy hearing the head dairyman shout to his mate across the yard, "Bill, spring's come, zno. Tubby's out." For twenty years or so we left it to Tubby to tell us when spring had really arrived, and never once did he give us false information. He was not concerned with official dates. His first appearance might be as early as February or delayed until May. Not until the world had been warmed to suit one of his delicate constitution did he venture forth. Poor Tubby! Somehow I liked him, and after a few years even those stern critics of laziness, his fellow working men, began to appreciate his qualities, and perhaps to admire his marvellous feat of living in comfort without either work, wealth, or worry.

Now he has left us I am sorry to find that my neighbours are dating spring by the calendar which is printed in town. I refuse to copy them, and shall continue to look out for spring as soon as Christmas is over. What matter if her early visits are but short ones, and that although she was here this morning to-morrow may see winter ruling the country-side once again? To-day spring greeted me on the downs and in the valley. To-day spring hatched out gnats around my head. To-day spring warmed the back of my neck. Sufficient for to-day was the goodness thereof.

II

Provided one writes with a pencil and therefore must be touching wood it seems safe to set down that at the moment the country seems to be freed of that dread scourge, foot-and-mouth disease. This then is surely a fitting time to estimate the harmful effect of that calamity

upon farming in this country: for, when the disease is raging all around one's farm, the attendant worry and uncertainty must warp one's judgment.

Thanks be, I have never had an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease on my own farm, but, in common with my neighbours, I have suffered considerable financial loss from this plague. Only real countryfolk can know just how widespread that loss can be during a serious outbreak. The farmers who witness the heartrending sight of their live-stock being burnt do, at any rate, receive some cash compensation, but their neighbours who escape the actual disease must bear the whole of the consequential loss themselves. In a stricken district no one escapes. Farmers, dealers, drovers, hauliers, auctioneers, farm-workers, hunting folk, keepers, riding-school proprietors, dog-breeders, retail tradesmen, the list is endless. The complicated jigsaw puzzle of rural life has been ruthlessly disturbed almost every piece is out of place, with some, perhaps, lost for ever.

Farming of any kind must mean an annual quota of both work and worry, but during recent years the load of the live-stock farmer has been greatly increased, while that of the crop farmer has been considerably lightened, mainly by mechanization. In the matter of work, apart from short rush periods, mainly at seed-time and harvest, the latter and his men can live almost a town life as regards hours. Very certainly, from Saturday midday until Monday morning can be reckoned with some certainty as leisure. In other words no longer need the carter clean and feed his team both weekdays and Sundays: instead the tractor under its tarpaulin sleeps the week-end unattended, what time its attendant rubs shoulders in cinema or football field on equal terms with the town worker. But live-stock, especially dairy farming, still means in the main a seven-day week for both master and man, whole-hearted co-operation on both sides rarely managing a regular half-day off for those engaged in it.

But it is when one considers the worry attached to the different businesses that the scales seem to be so heavily weighted against the live-stock folk. Worries connected with climate and prices are common to, and press equally upon both types of farming, but in addition to these the live-stock men have a far greater amount of those connected with official regulations of all kinds. That these are necessary in the interests of hygiene and public health goes without saying, but for some time now their burden has been so large and the profit from the business so small that hundreds of live-stock men have been thinking that the game is not longer worth the candle.

A visitation of foot-and-mouth disease is very often the last straw which decides a dairy farmer to be quit of the eternal worries of that branch of farming. And who can blame him? His farm is largely grass, and in good stead from years of live-stock farming. Mechanical equipment makes the change-over from grass to arable fairly easy. Why not grow a lot of grain for a few years on every possible acre, keeping a few dry cattle on the land which is too low-lying for the plough? Judicious handling, good cultivation, adequate dressings of artificial manures coupled with occasional summer-fallows and green manuring, would enable him to keep going quite happily for say ten years. An easier life, unquestionably. Afterwards, when the bank account of soil fertility has become dangerously low, what then? Oh, who cares? In ten years' time world civilization may have gone up the spout of war, pestilence, and famine. And anyway, the average age of most men farming in their own right to-day must be fifty. When they are sixty the job will be getting much nearer to being somebody else's worry.

It is easy for some critics to say, "What weak-kneed fellows such farmers must be, to change their style of farming just because of one unfortunate winter." Such folk have no conception of the loss which foot-and-mouth can bring to farmers in an infected area. Those who do not get the disease in their flocks and herds are unable to buy and sell stock, and so their whole business is soon hopelessly out of gear; while those who do get it lose the whole of the gross income from their live-stock farming maybe for several months.

The lot of the dairy farmer whose cows are killed and burnt is a very sad one. Granted, he is paid a fair market price for his herd, but what of the income from his farm? That welcome milk cheque does not appear with his letters on the twenty-second of each month, but most of his farming expenses carry on as before. His hay can neither be fed nor sold. His stock of roots must stay and spoil. No longer is he a welcome visitor on his neighbour's farm, but a pariah. Is it to be wondered that he is tempted to be quit of a type of farming which is subject to such financial shocks?

That, I think, is the most serious national danger from foot-and-mouth disease: that when time does put the rural puzzle together again it is found to be rearranged with fewer live-stock pieces. Which, of course, means that soon the fertility of our farming land will be depleted, and its defence value reduced. To prevent such a calamity would seem to-day to be a national problem, for the departure of live-stock means the coming of the desert.

Another trouble which a reduction in live-stock farming after an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease brings is the upset to the farm-workers. Shepherds seem to suffer the greatest hardship. Most dairymen and pigmen are men with flexible minds, who can turn their hands to any job and like it, but usually the out-of-work shepherd is not such a handyman. The head shepherd of a hurdled flock was always, when I had any intimate dealings with him, a law unto himself. In his eyes the farm was run by others, rather badly perhaps, but solely or at least mainly for the comfort and well-being of his sheep. That the said sheep were the property of his employer was entirely beside the mark. For all practical purposes they belonged to the shepherd, and his wrath was visited on all and sundry who failed to slave for them sufficiently hardily.

Somehow I cannot see the head shepherd turned into a carter or hedger, and I doubt whether he would even make a very good tractor driver. The best of his proper work was usually done in a contemplative fashion, if not in a tranquil frame of mind: for even when all was well with the sheep world his temper was ever the reverse of sunny.

When the inhabitants of his little hurdled world have perished in the holocaust of foot-and-mouth disease regulations, the shepherd is a tragic, pitiable figure. I have seen him, bereft of his sheep, a veritable Wessex Ishmael, mourning on the downs as perchance he snares rabbits or digs post-holes. And I have felt deeply sorry for him. It may be difficult to love either cows or pigs, but all the shepherds of my memory have loved their sheep, as witness this true story.

An old shepherd was walking home one evening in company with a farm-labourer friend. The couple had plodded half a mile or so downhill towards the village, when the old man stopped and said, "I forgot to say good night to 'em. I maun goo back." His companion laughed at him, and walked on homewards. But the old shepherd toiled back up the hill to the fold, where he leaned over the hurdles and said, "Good night, sheep. Good night to 'ee."

A very modern damsel to whom I told this described the tale as being "so twee," whatever that may mean. It occurs to me that some people might laugh at it. But when I first heard it I found myself very near to tears.

III

I was dining in town last night and my neighbour at table suddenly asked me whether standing grain in this country would burn.

Memory immediately carried me back some thirty-odd years to the sight of a large field of standing barley in South Wiltshire, which I had watched burning fiercely during my boyhood. I could still remember the crackle of it, and the sight of the scorched ears left broadcast on the blackened land after the fire had passed. So I said that standing barley would burn, but that I doubted whether standing wheat or oats would do so, as those cereals were usually cut in much greener state than barley, a crop which was left standing until it was dead ripe.

Then, of course, I asked the reason for his question, only to learn that there seems to be no limit to the possibilities of scientific frightfulness in warfare. Apparently the scientist has now produced some incendiary chemical which will set fire to anything, and the latest idea is to spray a whole country-side with this stuff by means of aeroplanes. In a drier climate than this, and especially in a country where the forests are mainly composed of conifers, given a good start to the fire and a good breeze and a whole country-side would soon be aflame.

The thoughts of such a happening makes me feel a trifle sick. I have lived with my neighbours in Western Canada in hourly dread of the prairie fire for weeks on end, and experienced the helpless terror of mankind when this menace sweeps the country-side at racing pace. I can remember the frantic ploughing which was done in attempts to steer a prairie fire into a cross-roads where it might be stopped for lack of fuel, and the fireguards which were ploughed every August around the barns and homesteads. Therefore to me the possibility of such warfare is especially horrible. Still, if it be possible for an enemy to set a whole country-side on fire at will surely war must finish, for who would entertain such a calamity? No matter how clever the scientist may be, I, a countryman, tell him that there is a higher power than mankind, and that if man decides wantonly to destroy wholesale the bounty of the good earth, the day may come when that bounty will no longer be forthcoming. That modern man is clever enough to do this horrible thing I have no doubt, but I am hoping that he will never be silly—no, wicked—enough to do it.

IV

How true it is that opinions differ according to the point of view, and how wide is that difference between the townsman's and countryman's estimate of the attractions and advantages of the settings of their daily life. Of the two the countryman is perhaps the more self-

satisfied, but I must confess that I think he has good reason. For instance, I once had occasion to do a job of work one evening in London, one which made it possible for me to do a day's work in Wiltshire before leaving for town in the afternoon. I went straight from Waterloo to the scene of action, and did not return to my club until after midnight.

Next morning at breakfast a town friend greeted me with "Hullo, farmer! Didn't see you yesterday."

I explained that I had not come into the club until late and then my friend asked me how long I proposed to stay in town. When I informed him that as soon as I had finished breakfast I intended to catch the eleven o'clock train from Waterloo he was amazed.

"What's the good of coming up for so short a time?" he asked. "Why, now you are up here, don't you seize the chance to stay and have some fun."

"Because I prefer my fun in the country-side," I told him. "I don't mind earning money in London, but I prefer to enjoy my ill-gotten gains in the country."

Which, although my friend seemed to disbelieve me, is quite true. London is where the money is, and by a curious whim of fate I am now fortunate enough to be able to extract a little of it in return for doing occasional lecturing, and broadcasting jobs. Apart from work, if I have to do so, I can manage to amuse myself in London, for a short time, three days being my limit. After that I just must get home somehow, when my pleasure at so doing is the most genuine thing about me. Just why my friend should have assumed my rural existence to be so dull that I must ever be craving the excitements of town I cannot make out. To me country life is packed full of excitements and interests, and, even if I had no work to do, I am certain that no week would be long enough for me to enjoy the many interesting things which the country-side would provide for my delight. Here are some examples.

The other day, acting, as the police put it, on information received, I visited an otter in captivity. Some time last November a baby otter was discovered in the street about a half-mile from my house. Presumably the mother had been disturbed by a car during the night while she was transporting her family across the road.

The foundling was nearly dead, but the huntsman of the local otter-hounds took it home and his daughter managed with infinite care and patience to raise the animal on the bottle. Result, to-day in a spacious

pen near the house is a gay little animal, over two feet long from its nose to the tip of its rudder.

It frolics like a kitten, answers to its name, "Kicker," dives and plays in a water-tank for all the world like the polar bears at Whip-snade and eats fish with gusto. Some day, I understand, it will find a permanent home in a private zoo.

Then there was the Wiltshire truffle-hunter, whom I helped with a broadcast the other day. He told me tales of a country sport of which I was completely ignorant. Of dogs which could wind a truffle underground fifty yards from its hiding-place if the wind were right and the truffle ripe. That those same dogs, although so keen on hunting truffles, would entirely ignore any game or rabbits which they passed during their work. That this wonderful behaviour on their part enabled him to obtain permission to hunt truffles in covers which were full of pheasants, and owned by the keenest of shooting-men.

During his truffle-hunting career he had become familiar with the country-side of eight counties, over most of which he had plodded on his feet in all sorts of weather. Years ago he was a familiar figure at many a country house in the West Country. Their inmates joined him in the sport, and afterwards purchased a bag as a delicacy. At one time he was so well known that a letter addressed, "Truffle Hunter, Salisbury Plain," was delivered to him in the ordinary way. Which speaks well both for his fame and the efficiency of the Post Office.

But now, he told me, truffle-hunting in this country is practically extinct. He himself is too infirm to do it, and the demand for English truffles has died. But for the outbreak of the war in 1914 he had arranged to go to France to back his dogs against all comers at the game. I wish he had made the journey, as I am insular enough to feel sure that he would have won.

He was, incidentally, one of the best broadcasters I have ever worked with, being entirely unselfconscious, and firmly convinced that what he had to say was well worth saying. We had a rough typescript prepared in case of accidents, but his natural conversation was infinitely superior, so, for the most part, we let it flow. His best remark came when I asked him the size of the truffles.

"They do vary. I've vound little 'uns, 'bout the zize of number your zhot, an' big 'uns up to a Jaffa horange."

Presumably he considered the first classification to be a trifle too difficult for the town mind, and deliberately chose the second to suit a London audience. Anyway, it was first-class broadcasting, and was recognized as such by both the public and Broadcasting House.

Now for a final illustration of rural excitements, just a drive in the country-side one fine spring morning, during which I went fox-hunting by car. This is not my habit, but the meet was twelve good miles away, a hack which at my time of life does rather take the gilt off the ginger-bread. Moreover, if further excuses for laziness are needed, my one horse had already done two days that week. Besides, there were visitors stopping in the house, people who, although country bred, had never seen fox-hunting at close quarters. Hospitality demanded that they should be considered.

Usually when one wishes to show country sport to the uninitiated the fates are against one. I well remember a town friend stopping his car, climbing over the fence and coming down to the river bank where I was fly-fishing. "I've heard a lot about this game," was his greeting. "I can spare a quarter of an hour. Let me see you catch one." I ask you! Needless to say, I also asked the fish without getting any reply whatsoever.

But on this occasion luck with us. After greeting friends and neighbours at the meet, we parked the car in the sun on the side of a down slope. From there we were able to watch the draw, hear the first burst of music, see the fox break cover, and trot leisurely away within a hundred yards of the car. In less time than it takes to write it, the pack were away after him, with the field streaming behind them. My friends will never get a better view of one of the prettiest sights in England's country-side.

Driving home we saw a "dead" sheep in a pasture about a hundred yards from the fence. It was immovable, on its back with its four hoofs pointing pathetically to the sky. I stopped the car, walked over to it, gave it one pull, and a very live sheep trotted away to join its companions.

These are just a few of the ordinary everyday happenings with which rural life is crammed to overflowing. People who say that country life is dull are merely emphasizing to rural listeners the fact that they have never lived it.

V

According to the weather spring corn-sowing may occur in February, March, or April; and, according to the whim of the farmer, oats, wheat, or barley may be the chosen grain to sow. But, no matter what one sows or when one sows it, one factor in the spring sowing seems

to remain constant—the east wind. During the last few days I have been wondering whether modern invention has lightened the lot of the farm-worker so very much after all. Very certainly, on the Wiltshire hills the carter has had the laugh on the tractor driver. The walker, plodding along behind his team, could keep warm, while the rider shivered on his iron seat, no matter how many cake-bags covered him.

However, one young farmer of my acquaintance has been going at full speed with a tractor and cultivator in spite of the cold. When I met him there was dust in the corners of his eyes and in his ears, and his cheeks were a burnished red from wind polish, but his eyes were as bright and eager as a robin's. He informed me that it was first-class weather for sweating noses, flying kites, and cultivating fallows; whereupon I suggested that the tractor which he was driving was man enough to pull a wider cultivator.

"That's just where you're wrong," he answered. "There's a bit of couch in this field, and I want to get it out. The faster a cultivator goes the better its work. Just the opposite to a plough. That wants to go slow, not more'n two and a half miles per hour at the outside."

"Oh, come," I argued. "Give us at least another mile per hour, else we'll be slower than horses."

"Devil a bit," he retorted, "and it wouldn't matter if you were. Most of this bad tractor ploughing is because the plough's going too fast. Never gets a chance to sit down. Much better to pull extra furrows in your lowest gear. But for cultivating, top gear every time. Cheero!"

And his cultivator leaped away from me just as though it had been pricked suddenly and shamefully from behind.

VI

Having ploughed and pressed the portion of the wheatfield which failed, owing to severe frost and a seed-bed which was not firm enough, and sown the land to white oats, during the past week we have been tackling the seven acres of rabbits' burrows and gorse-bushes over which the gyro-tiller staggered last autumn. During the winter we managed to find time to haul off the bushes and stumps, and some of the huge flints, but even then the field was in a very rough state.

A few days ago we put a spring-tined cultivator through it, up and down, round and round, and atheert and across. Result, something which looked a trifle more like a farm field, but one bearing a

second crop of flints. We carted these off, and then with infinite patience Charlie coaxed a tractor and a two-furrow plough over the field.

It was still too rough for the passage of either a wheeled broadcast or drill, so, after some persuasion on my part, two of my stalwarts to-day condescended to try their prentice hands at broadcasting oats from a bucket. We all knew the risk they were taking, that when the oats came up the regularity or irregularity of the sowing would be plain for all to see and criticize.

Charlie followed their efforts with the tractor and drags, and finally with a heavy roller, and to-night that's that for the time being. The next job must be to stick up some rabbit netting around the field. Then, when the oats are up green, we must broadcast some grass seeds, harrow them down, and wait patiently for Nature's pleasure. Of course, the job won't pay—in fact, I dare not think of what it has cost per acre up to date—but somehow it already yields me a curious satisfaction.

VII

Quite definitely, I have arrived at the age when a day's hunting is much more an opportunity to see the country-side than it is to exhibit my personal prowess in the saddle. Consequently, provided the weather is warm, the waiting when a large cover happens to be drawn blank is far less tedious to me than to the thrusters.

The other morning I was seated at ease surveying the country-side, when a friend rode up, suggested that things were rather dull, and inquired what I was looking at so interestedly. I told him that I was merely admiring the cattle in the pasture just below us. "A niceish bunch of stirks," I said. "Pretty colours. Evidently the owner fancies roans."

"What's that sort of thing worth?" he asked.

"Oh, about fifteen or sixteen apiece. There's thirty there. With the bull they'd hit a hole in five hundred quid."

"Golly," was the reply. "Few townsmen would realise that there was five hundred pounds' worth of capital wandering about that field."

Which is very true. Generally speaking, townfolk have no conception of the amount of capital which is invested in farming in this country. Indeed, I find that most of them can hardly credit the average tenant farmer has a minimum of ten pounds per acre capital invested in his farming. Add to that the value of the land, houses, and build-

ings, and the capital represented by the farming industry of Great Britain totals, I understand, very nearly to twelve hundred million pounds sterling.

Which reminds me that at least once weekly during the last few months I have been addressing town audiences with the avowed purpose of instilling into them a sounder appreciation of the value and size of British farming. In this country, and more especially overseas, I have invariably found that the majority of my listeners are apt either to forget or to ignore two things—firstly, that Great Britain is a part of the British Empire, and, secondly, that its farming is larger than that of any overseas dominion. Here are the actual figures in support of the latter contention:

	<i>Gross value of Agricultural Output</i>	<i>Number of People engaged in Farming</i>
Canada	£187,000,000	1,110,000
Australia	£150,000,000	524,000
New Zealand	£39,000,000	142,000
United Kingdom	£249,000,000 ¹	1,353,000

¹Excluding glasshouse produce.

To the many scornful town critics of British farming I would say, "Put that in your political pipe and smoke it. The home farming industry which you reckon of such little account produces annually sixty-two million pounds more than the farming of any overseas country in the British Empire."

Of course, this huge farming output from such a comparatively little country is not wholly produced from its farming land—a large part of it comes from feeding imported foods to live-stock. This, in itself, works in quite well with the Empire idea, as it enables the home farmer to be a good customer of the overseas farmer. But when one considers the employment figures, the important place in the world of our home farming as an employer of labour is little short of amazing, even to farmers who have long thought so. I had never dreamed that our farming here employed more people than Canada's. I knew from personal experience that farm-workers were much thinner on the ground over there, but when I looked at the two countries on a map, the figures seemed impossible. Moreover, the comparatively small size of New Zealand's farming was a great surprise.

But when one starts doing sums, to find out the output per person employed, our home farming does not come out very well. True, Britain tops Canada's £168 per head with the figure of £184. But New

Zealand's farm-workers produce £274 per head, and Australia's £286. The latter I can account for, as the huge sheep ranches must mean a high production per man employed, but I had always imagined New Zealand's farming to be very much like ours. Still, no country's farming can be quite like ours, especially in the matter of variation of soil, methods, and stock. Only the other day, I, a South Country dairy farmer, found myself about a hundred miles north of home in a completely strange farming country. This was the grazing country-side of Leicestershire, where dairy cows are few, and beef is king.

There I obtained a charming picture of the old-time farming of that district, or rather of its old-time marketing. Before the railway came along the beef of the Market Harborough neighbourhood went to Smithfield on the hoof, roughly some eighty miles. From what I could find out the general practice was to drive the cattle a long way the first day to get them tired, and then to throw them and shoe them.

How many days it took to get them to Smithfield I don't quite know, but I heard of one farmer, who used to drive his own fat beasts to London, while seated on a cob, and letting his clever dog do most of the droving. Then, as soon as the beasts were safely penned at Smithfield he used to tell his dog to go home; whereupon the animal trotted off for Harborough all alone, always arriving home quite safely and eager for the next job of work.

In that same district I was told great tales of racing pigeons. These have never come my way, but I can see that to breed and race pigeons is a possible sport for any one who possess the smallest of gardens to put a pigeon loft of sorts in. Apparently the Midlands are full of pigeon enthusiasts, both rich and poor, and I was told a tale of one wealthy financier which should make any horse-racing man there a little. The gentleman kept both horses and pigeons, and bred many valuable winning birds. He and his gardener were once standing watching some racing birds returning home, when their owner remarked, "Yes, they're better than racehorses in one way. Nobody can interfere with them up in the sky."

How very true!

VIII

How I wish that I could write a rural play, the reason being that I am continually hearing remarks by countryfolk, which are well worth repeating, but which can never be written in the first instance by any

author. The other day an old-age pensioner was trying to tell me that he did not altogether approve of a new-comer to his village, who had purchased the next-door cottage.

"I tell 'ee wot 'tis. 'Ee bain't no good, an' I doan' like 'im. 'Coorse, I doan' goo zo fur as to wish 'im any 'arm. All I do wish be as 'ee'd git up in one o' they aeryoplanes, an' vly, an' vly, an' vly."

The real quality of that remark is lost in the written version, but as I heard it the venom in the tone and the accompaniment of vicious sweeps of the old man's hand to each "vly" left no doubt in my mind that he wanted his neighbour gone.

Here, too, is a delightful instance of a word being used by a countryman both as a pronoun and a verb. Again the speaker was an old man, who was greatly incensed because a new-comer to his village persisted in addressing him familiarly with the word "thee." Eventually the ancient's patience was exhausted, and in reproof he broke out with, "Yer! Don't thee thee I." Bad grammar, perhaps, but the meaning is surely very clear.

On another occasion, during a very wet spring when my water-meadows were literally under water during March, and April entered the rural scene in floods of tears, I was moved to pour out much farming venom concerning the weather. My listener, who was wearing to eighty, agreed wholeheartedly, and capped my grumblings with, "Ay, an' I teli 'ee wot 'tis. Ef it doan't zeen alter yerabouts thic there cuckoo'll need to come awver web-vooted thease roun'.

I defy any one to write lines of that quality. They must come straight from their natural sources.

IX

I have recently been lecturing in the North of England, and I'm cross. I can forgive man for destroying country-side, but I cannot forgive him for dirtying it. Up in Yorkshire one has to journey twenty miles from the industrial district before the bark of the trees changes from grimy black to natural green, before white-woolled sheep look as though they had not been sleeping in a coal-cellar, and before the sun really shines. Lack of sunshine in the manufacturing towns and surrounding country-side must, I think, have a harmful effect upon crops, stock, and even human beings. Last week it seemed as though it were impossible for the sun to break through the mixture of cloud and smoke overhead, and I should imagine that such conditions obtain during most of the winter.

But in between the towns and underneath the murk they make the Yorkshireman farms, and usually farms well. His land seemed to be mostly under grass, and his farming mainly dairying and poultry. Which is both obvious and yet queer. Obvious, owing to the large consuming market for milk and eggs in the town near by; yet queer, because one always imagines dairying in clean green meadows near a stream, rather than in such black country.

I don't know where the traditional story of "Where are you going to, my pretty maid?" first happened, but if that question had been asked on a wet winter day in the Leeds district of Yorkshire during recent years the answer would not have been, "I'm going a-milking," but "anywhere out of this." Yet I have it on good authority that the concentration of dairy cows in this area is greater than anywhere else in England.

On my way home I visited another grass district, Leicestershire, a clean sweet country-side of good feeding grass and of beef cattle. In between the rainstorms the sun shone, and the whole landscape showed such a bright green. I don't know what such land is worth, but by its appearance and by the tales of its stock-carrying capacities a lot of it must let at fifty shillings per acre, and perhaps more. One of the best districts lies just east of Market Harborough, for I was informed that in choosing a feeding farm you must never lose sight of Langdon Church.

I slept one night in Market Harborough, and by my bedside I found an old book containing such an interesting quotation that I copied it down in my note-book:

"Three slender things that best support the world: the slender stream of milk from a cow's dug into the pail; the slender blade of green corn upon the ground; and the slender thread over the hand of a skilled woman.

"Three signs of increase: the lowing of a cow in milk; the din of a smithy; and the swish of a plough."

That ruling comes from the *Triads of Ireland* dated the ninth century, and, in spite of all mankind's boasted progress up to date, it is still true to-day. How I wish that more of our politicians would realize that it is that slender stream of milk which supports the bulk of Britain's farming.

X

For my sins I receive through the post a continuous stream of publications, each of which propounds a marvellous plan for the betterment of farming in this country. To do them justice, all contain much that is both sensible and desirable; but I have yet to study any scheme which in my view has any chance of working successfully in practice, at least not until three or four more generations of Britons have farmed this island and consumed its produce. Quite frankly, nearly all these schemes would work admirably if this country and the whole world were inhabited by saints. But most of us are far from being saints, and, in spite of the persistent yet slow progress of humanity towards that high estate, it will be a long time before the majority achieve it. So, while an increasing number of farmers, consumers, and legislators must, should, and in actual fact do try their best to look forwards instead of backwards, they are forced to confine their plannings to those schemes which have a chance of working under present or immediate future conditions. Even so I am convinced that always to sacrifice principle to expediency is short-sighted policy.

In consequence, I invariably try to study these publications fairly, and the other day I came across this sentence in one of them:

"It is hoped that in twenty years' time there will not be a single farmer in occupation of any holding exceeding 100 acres of average land."

Taking the word "average" as it is used there to mean that mountains, moorland, or rough grazing country will not be so restricted, there seems to be little to cavil at such an aim. Again and again I have had farmers say to me, "If more farmers had half their land taken from them they would be better off." Besides, it is well known that the small farm can best stand an economic depression, and also that an agriculture of this type must mean a greater production of foodstuffs and a healthy and numerous rural population.

So far, so good. Then I remembered a remark of a farmer friend, a man for whose business and farming capabilities I and all England have enormous respect. "Small holdings are all right. They don't provide a standard of living equal to that of the farm-workman but properly run they never fail. But the small farm is hopelessly uneconomic. To

put a boy into one is to condemn him to a lifetime of just missing the boat anyhow. 'Tisn't a job for any lad possessed of sense and guts. The smallest unit for ordinary farming not market-gardening is now a thousand acres, and two thousand's still better."

So there I am, stuck once more, for the dickens of it is that both these arguments seem to be right ones. The full advantages of modern science and invention can never be available for the small farm. For instance, take the cost of ploughing, pressing, and sowing grain. I have seen this done in one operation by a crawler tractor hauling a combined string of implements, and what is more I have seen the crop come up and grow to harvest afterwards. The quality of the actual work and the result were as good as anything I have seen from smaller tackle.

It seems to me that here is a rare puzzle for agricultural colleges. Quite rightly, they teach their students the latest methods, and also make them study farm costings. This must send the lads out into the farming world firmly convinced that the large holding is the only possible winner. And then the question of capital or rather the lack of it must condemn the great majority to begin their farming career in a way which they are convinced is economically unsound.

Of course, there is another side. When I think of the many farmers I know who began in a very small way and made a success of it, I begin to query this large farm argument. Every farmer in the country can point to man after man who by doing a little farm well was able to take a bigger one and then a still bigger one and so on. Is that capacity to begin small and grow large not a valuable characteristic in any man, especially in a farmer? Are not such men a valuable asset to the nation? Is it not a system which permits the striver to attain his just reward a sound one? It may be utterly illogical that certain men do make the small farm pay handsomely, but no one can deny that they do do it, in spite of the fact that most of the advantages of modern science and invention are denied them. It is useless for the rabid planner and economist to copy the man who, when he saw a giraffe for the first time, said, "There's no such animal." There is, thank goodness, the man who by hard work can make a small farm pay, and neither governments nor economic conditions can extinguish him.

But surely any form of strait-jacket must be bad for farming? To restrict it solely to enormous holdings, while such a procedure might bring greater efficiency and economy, would be to force a still greater number of countryfolk into the wage-earning class. By comparison with the small proprietor such folk, having no property, have no anchor,

and are therefore the more easily swayed by catch phrases and political breezes of every kind. It beats me why the Conservative Party has not striven wholeheartedly to enable a greater number of people to own a little property. For when a man has nothing to conserve it is difficult to see why he should vote Conservative.

Again, to lay down a hard and fast rule that no farmer shall occupy a greater holding than one hundred acres is to condemn all farmers to perpetual peasantry. That a number of townsfolk want to see this state of things come about I well know, but it must result in the best farming brains abandoning agriculture for town industry. Does any one imagine for one moment that a man like Mr. A. J. Hosier would be content with the job of farming one hundred acres, or that it would be in the national interest for him to be so restricted? It would be just as sensible to restrict Lord Nuffield to managing a two-by-four garage.

XI

This morning came a letter which annoyed me on two counts. The writer first suggested that I did not "really farm," and then accused me of farming by unnatural methods because I milked my cows by machinery.

Bless her heart, for the writer is a she, doesn't she know that it is unnatural for human beings to extract milk from the cow by any method, even unnatural for them to drink it? Or that any farmer like myself, who "really farms," has learned in the hard school of necessity that he must force the natural business of farming to adapt itself to supply the needs of a town civilization? Thus, although he knows that the natural bent of the hen is to lay eggs in the spring of the year, he knows also that to make a profit from the clucking bird he must make her lay all the year round, or rather most frequently during those months in the year when her natural habit would be to cease fire, so to speak. Why? Simply because the townsman wants an egg for his tea even in November. For years now the farmer has scorned the cow which merely wished to perform its natural function by giving enough milk to feed its calf. He ploughs by mechanical traction, gasses his rabbits, and produces vegetables out of season. In short, if he would make his farming pay, he must take as his business motto, "It's the unnatural thing to do."

Which reminds me of the story of the agricultural expert, who, during a lecture on the correct management and feeding of dairy cattle, had been continuously interrupted by one member of his audience. When it came to question time this same individual rose to his feet, and argued that most of the methods advocated by the lecturer were, in the speaker's view, unnatural and therefore unsound. Here is the lecturer's very apt reply.

"Of course modern farming methods are unnatural. In very few things to-day are human beings permitted to be natural. For instance, throughout my lecture you had the bad manners to interrupt continuously. Therefore, it would have been only *natural* if I had come down from the platform and socked you on the jaw. And if you would like me to be natural, I'm only too anxious to oblige."

XII

At long last, although the wind still hangs to the east, there is a hint of Spring in the air. Never, I think, do I remember seeing the country-side look more barren at this season than it did last week. Pastures were brown, many wheat fields looked a bare fallow, while even the water-meadows looked rusty. How in the world, I thought, as I rode over a wind-swept down, can anything ever grow up here?

Then a few days later things looked very different both on hill and in dale. The birds were singing, the wheat had its head up to the sun, and the grass seemed to be getting greener every minute. So much so that this morning I turned the cows out to grass with a sigh of relief. And very pretty they looked against the green carpet of the meadows, perhaps all the prettier to me because the top had just been taken off the second half of the last hayrick, and not a very big hayrick at that.

The farmer who dares to scribble concerning his calling must needs always be careful about describing the first grazing of the season. His natural inclination is to write, "I went to grass yesterday" or "I shall go to grass next week." Either of these seems to infer that he is a modern Nebuchadnezzar, and either, although a perfectly understandable remark in farming company, will most certainly bring hoots of derision from the uninitiated. But who cares? Let me be honest.

When hay is short at the tail end of a winter I go to grass thankfully. And so, I fancy, do most of my neighbours.

The cows, too, I imagine must be equally grateful for the change. Several months of dry grub must make the first green salad go down with a relish, and not yet, I think, has the scientist discovered anything synthetic which is equal to Spring grass as a cow food. Other farm animals which must be getting a bit sick of dry grub by now are horses, especially hunters. They are tired of stable. It is fairly easy to keep them up in flesh until Christmas, but soon after the New Year most of them seem to fall away. They are fit enough, perhaps, but one becomes more conscious every week that they possess ribs. However, a week or so now will mark the close of yet another hunting-season, and our long-suffering mounts will soon be turned out for their summer holidays.

XIII

What a change has taken place in the social position of cows in the farming world during recent years! In my boyhood sheep and corn were the aristocrats, and the cow was not even a poor relation, but a despised and rather dirty shopkeeper, selling its wares retail, or rather in dribs and drabs. Some forty years ago in Wiltshire cow-keeping farmers dared not attempt to travel to Salisbury market in the same railway carriage as the sheep and corn men, and even to-day the scorn of an old shepherd for both dairyman and dairy farmer has to be experienced to be believed. Only last year an ancient shepherd inquired how many ewes I kept. I told him that I had given up my flock of Hampshire Downs many years ago, and he asked, "An' wot 'ave 'ee bin at in place o' sheep?" "Pulling teats mostly, shepherd," I answered. "My, maister, but you 'ave come down in the world," was his reply.

Old values die hard in the country-side, but to-day there is no doubt that sheep have lost caste or that cows have gained it. To-day cows are news. To-day milk fills the political columns of the papers, and keeps the League of Nations quite busy. There are all sorts of milk, clean, dirty, accredited, tuberculin-tested, and certified. We have also Cherry.

What a famous lady she is! A week or two ago she wrote to me in this fashion:

"CHERRY"

requests the pleasure of your company at
RED HOUSE FARM, AMESBURY,
at her final milking
on completion of the 365 days' world's record,
at 12 noon on April 7th, 1939.
LUNCHEON AT 12.30.

Of course, I accepted. For one thing, no matter where she was born, the world's champion cow was now a Wiltshire cow, and as a good moonraker I was proud of Cherry, and anxious to do her honour. For another, this was the first time a cow had ever written to me, or that a lady had invited me to lunch for such a reason. Moreover, this particular day, April 7th, happened to be my birthday. So, in company with a hundred or more guests, I watched Cherry's final milking to close the recording year, and then went into the barn to drink her very good health. Quite one of the nicest birthday parties I've ever had.

During the twelve months Cherry gave eighteen and a half tons of milk, or thirty times her own weight. To the uninitiated perhaps a better valuation would be thirty-two thousand pint bottles. On the last day she yielded over ten gallons, so it seemed to me that she should have been named Tennyson's Brook, for she looked like going on milking for ever.

The curious point about Cherry's wonderful achievement is that by every generally accepted farming standard it should never have happened. What I mean is that everything was against it. Cherry boasts no fine pedigree of a long line of heavy-milking ancestors. Her parentage is unknown, for she was bought by chance at the ordinary weekly auction sale of commercial cattle in Salisbury market. Then, horror of horrors, she spent a year or two in a bail herd, where she was milked by machinery, and lived outdoors winter and summer on the bleak stretches of Salisbury Plain.

Why then is Cherry now the world's-champion cow? For three reasons—firstly, because of a natural aptitude for milk production; secondly, because she was blessed with a good digestion; and thirdly, because her owner had the good sense to allow her herdsman to exploit both these assets to the full. Digestion is the main factor in milk production. Up to a point a cow is like a slot machine, the more food you put into her, the more milk you can take out. But this process carries on only as long as the cow can digest the food she eats, indi-

gestion slowing down the milk-making machinery considerably, and sometimes causing a breakdown beyond repair.

Even so, I think that there is some truth in the whispered criticism that in most cases we judge our farm live-stock by false standards—that is to say, by certain pedigree show points rather than by performance. How can any one pick out the best milking cow from a dozen others merely by appearances? I defy any one to pick out the Derby winner by the same guide. Thoroughbred horses are judged not by breed points but by their performances on the race-track, as the widely differing fees of various stallions bear witness, the classic winners commanding top prices? The query with thoroughbreds for racing purposes is not, "What does he look like?" but "What has he done?" and it is high time the same queries were put to dairy cattle. Anyway, no matter what she looks like, Cherry, like a Derby winner, can now challenge the world on her performance, not worrying half a pint of anything over show points. For the definite manner in which she has exposed some of the fallacies of the pedigree stock world British farmers should be very grateful.

XIV

For some years now I have made it a rule to keep off the roads as much as possible during Bank Holiday week-ends, so on Easter Monday morning I went hunting, a warm woodland day to finish the season. The sport was in and out and round about Grovely Wood, with one useful run to ground, and lots of fun generally. During a check in the west and less-frequented end of the wood a woodman who was watching said, "I s'pose you be lookin' fur old So-and-so. 'Ee bain't cum up to-day. 'Twer a year ago to-day you met 'im up yer. My, but that wur a go, an' no mistake."

This reminded me of a quiet hack over the same ground on the previous Easter Monday. I had left the primrose-pickers far behind, and for some two or three miles had seen no human being. Then, I had come upon an old hurdle-maker hard at work in a clearing in a wood. However, he seemed willing to chat, and once started he gave me lots of good advice and criticism. I had never met him before, so we started from scratch.

"Be you a varmer?" was his first question, after we had wished each other good-morning.

"Then you niver knowed sich a dry time in Spring afore? Nect did I, an' I be a zight older than thee. Who be 'ee?"

I told him my name, and where my farm was situated.

"Ah!" he said. "I knowed yer father. Ah well, he bin gone a few years now. An' I be seventy-five, an' I shall soon goo."

This seemed rather a gloomy thought, so I complimented him on his obvious fitness at such an age, and asked why he was at work on a Bank Holiday.

"I come up in 'ood fer to get out o' it all. Somewhere quiet. The vust time I walked up yer to work I wur but ten year old. Earned but a shillin' a wik, an' 'ad precious little vittles."

"Well, times are a lot better to-day," I said. "Better wages, better houses, everything's better."

"Mebbe! Look yer, be you the veller wot do broadcast?"

I nodded.

"Then why dussent tell 'em the truth about the country-side? That 'tis villed wi' a lot o' lazy volk as bain't wuth vindin'. I tell 'ee, I be a eyesore to the main o' me neighbours. I got me own house, I got a hundred fowls, I got two pigs, an' I do keep me garden tidy. They tother-me do live in council houses—beautiful houses, mind—but they be too lazy to do their gardens. I do shame 'em. They'll be glad when I be gone. Whatever be the world comin' to, mister?"

I did not know, nobody does, and I said as much.

"Humph! 'Tis gwaine wrong. Fact o' it, 'tis very near gone. Iverywhere the same. I bred up a vamily, an' the main on 'em do grouse, wikdays an' Sundays. I got a bwoy in Canada. 'Ee don't write very cheerful. Be all account varmin' out there be havin' a bad time, wuss than 'tis yer, an' that's bad enough. Land gooin' back iverywhere you do look. Shameful."

I agreed, and informed him that I had recently visited Canada, and had seen the effects of the successive years of drought on the farming in the West.

"Where's thee git the money to goo gallivantin' out abroad? Niver honest out o' varmerin'. Ah coorse, 'tis thic broadcastin', varmin' 'ouldn't vind it."

I admitted the charge in some measure, for I felt rather humble in the face of such honest even if crabbed old age; but while admitting that I was a lucky man to have such a second string to my bow, I suggested that I tried my best to broadcast honestly.

"Ay! I 'low you tries yer best, but I reckon you don't try 'ard enough. Still, I've a yeard wuss. Now you'd best git on, fer I maun make zum 'urdles. But you mind what I've telled 'ee."

"Just what do you want me to say?"

"That the country be villed wi' lazy vagabonds. That there be a zight more rogues an' more volk in debt in ivery class than there wur when I wur a bwoy. An' that unless volk do work 'ardēr, live quieter an' more 'onest, England'll soon be a doner. Thee spit that out awver the wireless an' I shall die 'appy."

With that I left him, and rode home thinking deeply. No matter how much discount I took off his remarks for the crabbedness of old age, I could not help deciding that he had been talking sound, honest common sense.

But who am I to broadcast such vitriolic comment on society to-day? I have no right to do so, but he has every right, the right of a lifetime of honest work in England's country-side. However, to my credit I did broadcast the pith of his conversation, including that piercing gibe "Niver 'onest out o' varmerin'."

XV

The other day I had occasion to call at a country house which I had never visited before. It was a lovely Spring morning, and the outlook from the window was so pleasing that I murmured my admiration aloud. My hostess agreed, and told me that although she had lived there scarcely a twelve-month she loved both the house and its setting, but remarked that it had one drawback.

"It's nearly two miles to church," she said, "so we have to go there by car. And somehow I've always preferred to walk to church on Sunday mornings. But I just can't manage the distance from here."

By certain modern standards that is, I suppose, a rather silly and old-fashioned preference. Now that science and invention have granted us motor-cars, why not use them and be thankful for such an aid to comfort? But, while I subscribe to that view, I cannot help respecting the other. It may be silly. But I can recognize that there's a sound quality about it which commands deference from inferior folk such as I.

However, I'm afraid that I did not profit from it nor try to emulate it, for the following Sunday morning I found myself driving my car once more, and this time not even to church, but merely around the

country-side in order to enjoy the sight of a landscape which was so obviously waking up at the call of Spring.

And I soon found that I was not alone in my way of spending a fine Sunday morning. Everywhere I found people either driving, cycling, or walking along the country roads. Youth had brought out the tandem from its winter stable, and the sun had tempted the old bones of age to toddle along the lane. We all should, perhaps, have been in church, but it was difficult to feel that our truancy was a very serious crime that morning.

One thing which always impresses me when I look at the English rural landscape is that its outline changes very little with the passing of the years. For instance, every time I go through the village of Fovant I marvel at the almost complete disappearance of the military occupation there during the war years. To-day very little trace of those huge camps remains to be seen. A pile of bricks and stone here, a patch of cement there, and the various regimental badges on the side of the downs. But that is all. The farming of Wiltshire has overflowed the rest, and it is hard to believe that where cows graze to-day, soldiers camped less than a quarter of century ago.

Of course, the actual farming of our country-side has changed tremendously and will, nay must, continue to change as the times demand. Where once the plough and the Hampshire Down sheep ruled the fields, now cows and poultry hold dominion. Perhaps one of the greatest changes in our south-country farming during recent years has been the general spread of the practice of keeping all sorts of live-stock out of doors all the year round. I had to get out a short history of outdoor milking under the bail system the other week, and this job reminded me of all sorts of things. How most of us scouted such a method as absurd when we first heard about it. How, when it steadily prospered, a good many folk went out of their way to run it down. Of the difficulties of its originator, and of my own when I copied his methods years afterwards.

A few years ago a bail was a very rare thing indeed, and now one can scarcely drive three miles in Wiltshire without seeing one. It is amazing how this system of dairying has spread on suitable land, and equally amazing how the outdoor principle has spread to other classes of farm live-stock. The long line of folding poultry-houses is now a familiar sight, and the practice of folding pigs is definitely on the increase. I passed an example of the latter the other morning after a wet night, and the pigs looked just as though each had had a hot bath.

Their whity pinkness showed up against the brown soil of the hillside most distinctly.

Incidentally, I write these lines with a south-west window wide open, a warm sun on the back of my neck, and a young terrier basking in a sunlit streak upon the carpet. Outside the lawn-mower chatters, and a would-be tennis player is searching the lawn with a fork for the lost corners of the court. A combination of pleasant things which makes me glad to be in England, and tells me April's here.

XVI

This morning a letter from a friend in Canada brought back all sorts of memories—of a lecture out there a year or so ago, of my life out West soon after I had left school, and a tale of British farming which that same friend had told me. How true it is that one often learns the truth of home when far away from it, for I have no reason to doubt the truth of this story, and its charm cannot be denied.

Way back in the days of the late Queen Victoria a noted Scottish farmer won the Smithfield championship for beef cattle with a beast of the Aberdeen-Angus breed. Possibly to confound those who associated Aberdeen with the quality of carefulness, he presented the beast to the Queen as the Christmas beef for her huge household. In return her Majesty promised to visit his farm during her next visit to Scotland. In due course official notice came of the intended visit; and how that farm and steading were cleaned and smartened up. The byres were lime-washed, the paths were weeded, and a small pavilion was erected to shield the Royal visitor from either rain or sun. Nothing was left undone to make this occasion a complete success in every detail. There was only one worry in the old farmer's mind—Charlotte was old, very old.

When the great day came the herd was paraded before the Queen. First came the wee calves, next the yearlings, then the two-year-olds, and so on. As each beast came before the pavilion the farmer explained its points and merits to the Queen. But all the time he was doing this he was wondering what he could say to prove to her Majesty the wonderful qualities of Charlotte, who came at the end of the line. For he knew that Charlotte was not only old, but a bit lame, and a trifle thin—in fact that she was not wearing her best clothes. How could he make the Queen understand that this old cow was the founder of his herd, a champion herself and the mother of champions, when

Charlotte looked so old and worn by comparison with the younger cattle?

Then, when the time came, he forgot everything he had prepared in his mind, and walked across to the old cow, put his arm around her neck, turned her face towards the pavilion, pointed to her Majesty, and said, "Charlotte, this is Queen Victoria!"

Was ever royalty introduced in more charming fashion?

XVII

I have just been watching a gyro-tiller fitted with an internal combustion engine of one hundred and seventy horse-power doing a job for which I had nothing but admiration. On the top of one of Wiltshire's high downland ridges it was dealing with about a hundred acres of gorse and thorn scrub. Which is not by any means the right description of its activities. Dealing is far too mild a word. Annihilating gives a much better picture of the scene. Slowly but surely the juggernaut crept along, leaving behind it a nine feet wide wake of altered countryside. Gorse, thorns, or stones could not hinder it. Out they came in a rough swath, and underneath them lay soil which had been well whisked at least ten inches deep, for not one particle was missed by its persistent fingers. When the machine pushed its way ruthlessly through a patch of stiff blackthorn bushes, almost trees, some sixteen feet high, one of my friends who was with me said aloud, "I call that damn indecent." Indecent it may have been, but efficient it certainly was.

But although I have nothing but praise for the efficiency of the gyro-tiller at this particular job, I was forced to marvel at the daring of the farmer who was employing it. To play with seven acres of gorse bushes as I have done is perhaps a justifiable luxury, but to set about a hundred acres of scrub land in this fashion is a very expensive business. In such heavy scrub the cost of the first breaking by a gyro-tiller is about forty-five shillings per acre. Then, the scrub must be collected and burnt, and the big stones carted off. Subsequently there will have to be much costly cultivating work by more ordinary farm tackle, and with luck that hundred acres which was waste land this April will be sown to wheat next October, and come to harvest some ten months afterwards.

Such a transformation scene is eminently praiseworthy, as are all attempts at land reclamation, but does the British nation value such

national improvements high enough to reimburse in profitable farming conditions the man who makes them at his own risk? I doubt it. But, doubts and all, I could not help admiring the pluck of the farmer responsible for this one, for he is wearing to seventy.

But in one connection I have no doubts whatsoever about this implement being a tip-top performer, and that is in its treatment of rabbits. I hate rabbits, being annoyed at man's apparent inability to conquer them, and for this reason I am prepared to take my hat off most humbly to the gyro-tiller. By gum! The "gyro"—in this connection I feel so fond of it to shorten its title from pure affection—is death to rabbits. Each time I watched it stagger over a burrow I gave a silent cheer. The rabbits which it does not kill are either well buried or tossed out in such a dazed condition that they can be easily caught. The driver of this particular machine informed me that he and his mate had caught forty odd saleable rabbits in a few days, which I hope and believe were their perquisite. They must have annihilated quite as many, and given the rest a stiffish job of work to reach the light of day by their own efforts. Indeed, if I were a rabbit so buried, I doubt whether I should bother to dig my way out. What would be the good? Soon after one had found another burrow the gyro would come along and deal just as faithfully with it.

No, Mr. Rabbit, you might just as well admit that you are whacked. You have cost mankind all over the world millions of pounds, much hard work, and a dickens of a lot of bad language. In addition, you have ruined thousands of acres of this island. But when the gyro comes along you are literally down and out. So enamoured am I with the way in which this implement deals with rabbits that if I were a millionaire I would keep one as a pet, and go round the country rabbiting just for fun.

XVIII

Horsey, horsey, don't you stop,
Just let your hoofs go flipperty flop.

All down the ages popular songs have mirrored current happenings and opinions; and, inane as most of the modern lyrics are, they still carry on the same tradition. True, the majority of young people who sing them scarcely give a thought to any possible meaning. Certain

word jingles go with certain tunes, and with these they provide an almost continuous accompaniment to their waking moments. It is to be hoped that when they *are* silent and asleep, a natural thing to do, that some one does not stop them from dreaming of that little old lady who nowadays seems to be eternally passing by. But when they implore the horse not to stop they are illustrating a rather astonishing truth. In spite of the rapidly increasing mechanization of almost every department of our lives during recent years, the horse seems to be going much more strongly than the most die-hard of horse-lovers would have thought possible some twenty years ago.

Ever since the advent of the motor-car the horse seemed to be fighting a losing battle. Better roads for cars meant roads so slippery that a horse could scarcely stand on them, and on which a journey on horseback was asking for a broken thigh. The desire for greater transport speed, the craze for saving time, the much greater expense per mile of the horse compared with the machine all combined to force the horse out of business; and, in the days when motoring was indeed a pleasure, to cause him to be discarded from mankind's play as an out-of-date toy. Even hunting suffered: for the young of both farmers and subscribers were spending all their spare time at the wheel. By 1930 the horse was a back number, and, in the opinion of most people, one which would never be recalled.

On the business side of life that opinion has been proved justified. True, the horse still maintains a small place in our farming and a still smaller one in our road transport, but each year sees both these places become less important. It is in the play or leisure side of human life that the horse has come into fashion once again. The reason for this extraordinary survival—indeed, revival is perhaps the better word—is due to the very natural revolt of mankind against the dominion of machinery. A machine is efficient, but most of us need more than efficiency in our lives. Sometimes we desire uncertainty. Moreover, we recognise the need for intimate contact with natural things. So, having become tired of our mechanical toys, we have turned back to the horse in the same way as the natural child turns away from the latest mechanical marvel to its well-beloved rag doll.

The surprising thing is that everybody is following the fashion—rich and poor, male and female, old and young—and that few seem to regret doing so. Hunting is and must be largely restricted to the farming community and to those outside it who can afford such an expensive pleasure, but hacking has become within the reach of most. Riding-schools are increasing every day; and, thanks to the work of

Institute of the Horse and the Pony Club, in every way they are rapidly becoming better and better.

Here, I suppose, one must mention woman, and admit that in this revival of riding she is far too many lengths, even fields, ahead of man. Why does the modern boy scorn the horse? In most Pony Clubs he is outnumbered by his sisters in the ratio of one to six, and the same proportion is to be seen in the hunting-field. Moreover, as a general rule the modern girl rides better and with far more guts than the boy, so much so that even the most crabbed old sportsman is forced to give the girls their due. And there you have the position in a nutshell. It is the girls of all classes who are keeping the horse going in this mechanical age, while their brothers are still more interested in mechanical toys.

However, the middle-aged man is also doing his share, and enjoying it. Usually he takes up riding because he is told that this pastime will reduce his weight. Soon he begins to love it for its own sake, realizing that each ride is different from the last, that horses have personalities, that each must be studied and considered, and that by comparison with riding a car journey is deadly dull and monotonous. When this point is reached he is lost completely, and will ride a horse until death, infirmity, or financial stringency makes this impossible.

Well, he might indulge in many worse vices. The only way to see the country-side or to gain the approval and respect of countryfolk is to travel on horseback. To-day few can attempt to emulate Cobbett, but we can all enjoy a rural ride, and revel in the partnership between man and mount, in these days almost the only form of liberal education.

All of which comes, no doubt, from going to Wilton May Fair this morning, and noticing there a much greater interest in horses than has been shown for many years. There were even some Irish hunters on view, good ones; and farmers who have not been astride a horse for many years wasted a few moments in watching them show their paces.

During recent years most farmers have been forced to become mechanically minded, but in their hearts they all prefer horses to machinery. I spoke to one friend about this as we were watching a hunter being ridden up and down.

"Thirty years ago I should ha' took that chap home," he said. "A car ain't a patch on a good hoss."

Cold print cannot convey the feeling in that remark.

XIX

Criticism, of course, is always dangerous to those who employ it, and on this score I wonder whether we countryfolk are always fair to our town cousins. True, their many criticisms of us, although usually exaggerated or unjust, do receive wide publicity, while the countryman's habit is to growl his comments on townsfolk in private. Even so, the latter are often none the less venomous, the usual method being to end up with, "An' what the hell do townsfolk know about farming anyway?" Often apparently, they know quite a lot.

The other day a celebrated London surgeon told me that recently he had been called out of town by the local doctor to visit a patient who lived in a farmhouse. The consultation over, finding that he seemed to be interested in farming, the son of the house asked whether he would care to have a look round the farm. To the farmer's great surprise his visitor accepted with alacrity, and to his greater surprise showed during their walk that he was very knowledgeable concerning farming problems.

"Why?" said my friend to me, in telling the tale. "Why should he be so surprised that I knew the difference between a horse and a cow? Damn it! I was brought up in a country village. And I tell you that nearly half London was brought up in the country. I don't think you fellows who are privileged to live and work in rural England are fair to your neighbours who are condemned to get their living in town. You say we don't understand you; the real trouble is you don't understand us."

I pass on this conversation here because I think that it illustrates a state of things which many countryfolk are too apt to forget.

XX

This afternoon a journey with a neighbour in order to inspect a new farming gadget in operation has shown me yet another scene of land reclamation in Wiltshire. For many years now Snap, near Marlborough, has been the dreadful illustration of a deserted village in a thickly populated island. Some eight or nine years ago I explored Snap in this same friend's company, and subsequently wrote and published

my disgust at its derelict condition. Now, he told me as we set out, we were to see a transformation scene.

A few miles out of Marlborough, where the lowland rises to a famous down, a mile or two right-handed off the Swindon road, lie the remains of the once prosperous village of Snap. According to Sir W. Beach Thomas in his book, *How England becomes Prairie*, Snap once boasted two good farmhouses, a chapel, fourteen cottages, and a school which was attended by forty-four children. When I first visited Snap I could only find the ruins of the cottages, and two derelict farmhouses with grass sheep wandering through the downstairs rooms. It was horrible to witness, and I remember that I described it as the abomination of desolation. It evidently had a similar effect on Sir W. Beach Thomas, for the sight of this extinct hamlet made him think of that pathetic phrase of Virgil, "*Troja Fuit.*"

Now one Snap has died, and another has been born. This afternoon we found five new cottages, heard of plans for more and probably a farmhouse, and saw a busy farming over some fourteen hundred acres, which for years had been a thinly-stocked prairie, covered with thorns and besprinkled with rabbits. Already there are, I understand, five bail herds of dairy cows. We saw pig-houses in the course of construction; miles, it seemed, of rabbit wire; water troughs with water laid on in every field; a manure distributor doing its job behind a tractor; and, most welcome change of all, nearly twenty employees engaged in agriculture.

The gentleman who is now farming Snap is not an aged wealthy townsman, who has decided to play with some farming as a hobby, but a comparatively young townsman who has decided to make farming his business. Apparently for health reasons a country life was desirable, so he decided to work instead of play in his new setting, in other words to have a real go at farming. It is interesting to note that while the drift of elementary schoolboys to the town continues unabated, there is a small but increasing drift of public schoolboys in the opposite direction. Some of the latter take jobs in farming, others invest their capital in established farms. This one is investing his brains, brawn, and money in a derelict farm, which at first sight must have appeared a hopeless proposition.

But when one sees what has been accomplished in barely a year, and considers what a worth-while enterprise this is from a national standpoint, one can have nothing but praise for it. It is to be hoped that the powers that be will see fit at least to give such daring a chance to succeed. The original Snap was an asset to the nation; the Snap

of the last ten years or so, perhaps longer, was a national disgrace; but the Snap that now is shows promise of something which shall wipe out the shame which preceded it.

So much for the general reclamation of Snap; now for the special farming gadget which we had journeyed to inspect. This was electrical fencing, as applied to outdoor dairying. The original material used for enclosing the necessary corral in which to gather the cows at milking time was flexible chestnut fencing. This is still to be found with most bails to-day, but while it does the job adequately it is awkward stuff to handle and to transport. Until the other afternoon the only substitute for this which I had come across was a set of iron hurdles on wheels, again to some extent subject to the same criticisms. Therefore, to see a herd of sixty cows enclosed by one thin plain wire, strung on standards nearly fifteen yards apart, looked absurdly inadequate by comparison.

Of course, my friend and I had to handle that thin barrier, but once was enough. After that we were broken to electric wire as completely as were the cows inside it. The current is not continuous, but is given through a kind of make and break, and the effect is very similar to that experienced from touching the plug of a car while the engine is running. It doesn't hurt exactly, but you don't emulate Oliver Twist and ask for more. So it is with the cows. When they have experienced one shock, they have had all they want. The herd we visited would not go near the wire, not even if we tried to drive them against it. They stayed placidly inside the corral and made no attempt to join their companions which had passed through the bail to the field outside.

That this corral could be erected very quickly, and that it was an efficient enclosure during winter time was evident. But would it keep the cattle inside during a hot thundery July afternoon when the stout fly was busy? I don't know, and neither did any one present, having had no experience of this type of fencing during summer. But the point arises—will anything keep cows in under such conditions? I have yet to find it.

This method of fencing seemed to be exploiting fear, in the same way as the Western cowboy exploits the fear of the rope in training his horse. Early in its education he allows it to get hopelessly tangled up in his rope, and the discomfort is such that for ever afterwards the animal keeps its feet away from such a dangerous thing, even when its rider ropes a steer from the saddle.

It is perhaps early days to say that electrical fencing has come to stay, either in outdoor dairying or general farming, but my impres-

sion the other afternoon was that next time I have to renew my milking corral this type of fencing will have to be seriously considered. I was told that when properly insulated this gadget will electrify up to thirty miles of fence. If this is correct two things should be possible. One will be the ability to make a much longer corral than is now practicable; and the other perhaps to teach some of the farmer's uninvited human visitors that fencing costs money, and should be left severely alone by those who do not pay for it. Anyway, getting over or through a fence of this type would not be a very pleasant pastime, save for the onlooker.

XXI

I have just come across a rather curious rural custom which still survives in a certain county—perhaps it were better for it to remain anonymous—wherein both the hunting and the grazing is hard to beat. Evidently at some period in its history its inhabitants must have been great admirers of Dickens; for, during a recent visit, my hostess informed me that, no matter what their real name might be, new-comers to the district were always known by the name of Snodgrass.

Apparently, this practice is general, irrespective of rank or wealth. Members of county society, when talking of the new-comers, say to each other, "I say, have you called on the Snodgrasses at So-and-so yet?" while the rank and file of the locals refer to the immigrants as "They Snodgrasses." There is, I understand, no set length for the Snodgrass period of existence; but of course, some folk graduate out of it much more quickly than others.

I must confess that this custom was news to me, and I dare say many people would ridicule it, but I can well understand that those who live under it find it real enough. For did I or did I not discern a little pride and satisfaction in my hostess's remark, "Oh, no. We're no longer Snodgrasses. Haven't been for some months. It's the So-and-soes who are the Snodgrasses in this district now."

XXII

At this time of year I try my best to find time to shoot or gas or dig out a rabbit or two every day, for one of the worst enemies of

our farming industry, second only to the politician, is the rabbit. Just now the rabbit population is increasing by leaps and bounds, both literally and figuratively. One sees baby rabbits playing around every burrow, and in a few weeks, curse them, these babies will be producing babies of their own. One of the best ways to kill off these pests at this season is to shoot them by night with the aid of a car's headlights. Provided this practice is carried out only by the person who is farming the land driven over, and never in a public highway, I can see little objection to it from any angle. Shooting to my mind, is less cruel than almost any other method of exterminating these vermin, and I cannot think that it can seriously disturb game. That, of course, is the landlord's objection to it, and probably why it is an illegal practice when performed by a tenant farmer.

But now there is talk of making it illegal for any one to do it, the two chief objections being that shooting late at night is dangerous and annoying to the general public, charges which, in my view neither severally nor collectively, make out a case against night shooting. The very rare occasions when people living in villages within earshot of the shooting have been so disturbed and frightened that they have risen from their beds would not have occurred but for two reasons. Firstly, owing to the general fear of air bombardment, for which dictators and politicians should be blamed rather than farmers who shoot rabbits after dark. Secondly, because while it is illegal for tenant farmers to use this method of rabbit reduction it can never become general. Were it a recognised legal method of rabbiting by tenant farmers, it would become so common that no one hearing shots at night would worry one little bit.

So much for the charge of annoying people; now for the contention that night shooting is dangerous to them. To use a favourite expression of my impudent childhood—I don't see it. Provided night shooting be carried out on private property, as it always should be, where does the danger to the public come in? Most of the public will be either in bed or indoors thus late in the evening, and the remainder have no right to be on private property after dark without the express permit of either owner or occupier.

At this time of year when rabbits refuse to bolt from ferrets, my experience is that night shooting from a car is more efficient than any other known method, save perhaps poison, which, of course, does kill other wild beasts and birds. In one hour two men in a car, one to drive and one to shoot, will bag four times the number of rabbits than those same two men will bag in a day's hard work with ferrets, guns,

and spade. Of course, the older and more open the car the better, provided its lights throw a good beam, but any will serve. The ideal would be a car with a very narrow bonnet, on which could be fitted a saddle and stirrups. In such a position I am convinced that I should be invincible on the darkest night. Indeed, I don't do too badly from a low modern saloon, once I have arranged the headlights to suit. The off-side light is left to throw a beam straight ahead, the near side one is slewed towards the left at an angle of about forty-five degrees. The driver of the car picks up the rabbit with the off-side headlight, keeps it in that beam until the car is well within gunshot, and then turns the vehicle away to the right, thus bringing my musket to bear through the open door on to the victim, which is now running in the beam of the near-side light. A very exciting game, and a most efficient one, for practice has now brought this farming tank to great accuracy of both movement and fire. Indeed, rarely is a cartridge wasted.

It occurs to me that this detailed confession of my spring-time habit of such illegal practice may lead to conviction. If it does I shall have to adopt the method used by a Cotswold farmer who wrote to me the other day. He also gets after his rabbits in the dark with a motor-car, but instead of using a gun he uses a small greyhound, which he has trained to ride on the running-board of the car, being supported there by the finger of the near-side passenger. I imagine that the door of the car is removed. As soon as the dog shows that he has spotted a rabbit in the beam of light it is released, jumps off the footboard, gathers the rabbit in a few moments, and returns with it to the car. My correspondent insists that a man and a car, with a smart boy in charge of the dog, can bag from sixty to eighty rabbits in a night's work of three hours. This method, of course, has many advantages over night shooting. It dispenses with both noise and the cost of cartridges, bags a more saleable rabbit, and up to date is legal. But I suppose that if it becomes at all popular, something will be done to stop it. It is curious what a lot of friends rabbits seems to have.

However, although I possess neither greyhound nor whippet, I wanted to test the dog method, so the other night I took Judy with me, and set out when the rest of my household were safe in bed. Why is it that women get so annoyed when their men decide to do something harmless like this? I never know, but all my womenfolk informed me that I was quite mad, as mad as Judy. This, in my view, was either an insult to a good dog or a compliment to myself. Judy is a diminutive wire-haired terrier, who has two passions in life, cats and rabbits. In my more maudlin moments I speak of her and to her

as the only woman I ever really loved. And for good reason. She never scolds me, she never criticizes me; instead, no matter what happens, every day in every way she tells me that she adores me wholeheartedly. When one considers the cheapness of her diet, that she requires neither clothes nor hairdressing, and that the annual total cash outgoing on her behalf is but seven shillings and sixpence, it seems marvellous why any man bothers with women at all. Which, of course, is rank heresy, and one which I don't believe, but to write which affords me a curious satisfaction.

To get back to our test of this new method of rabbit catching. It passed with flying colours. Judy, in spite of her great heart, cannot hope to compete with a greyhound for speed, but in one half-hour's ecstasy alone and unaided she caught three fully-grown rabbits. A good gipsy lurcher, trained to pick up a rabbit in its stride, would have bagged a dozen. So I have decided to invest in a lurcher at the first opportunity, for I stick to it that the only good wild rabbit in Britain, during either peace or war, is a dead one, and that any method which will help farmers to reduce this pest should be not only permitted but encouraged. A farming Britain minus ninety per cent. of its present rabbit population would be at least two counties larger from a food production point of view. And by that I don't mean Rutland and Flint, but two counties of average size.

XXIII

I motored through Oxford this afternoon on my way home from a business engagement in Coventry. Never do I pass through this city without thinking of this true story. I do not tell it here with any idea of insulting my many good friends at Oxford, or any other university, but to illustrate how apt countryfolk are in their comments even when they mangle or misuse a word.

Two village women met in the village street, just after one of them had been talking to a lady and her son, and the following conversation took place.

"Lard, Mrs. Budge! That bain't never Mrs. 'Ardcastle's son, be it? Gracious! 'Ow 'ee a growed."

"Yes, 'tis. I jist bin talkin' to 'em. You know, 'ee don't zim very bright."

"Well, 'ee jist come back from the universe. You cain't expect no difference, secin' as 'ee'm one o' they undergrades."

When my native Wilts really gets down to things it's hard to beat.

XXIV

Once again during a drive round the country-side I have seen something which did not please me one little bit, and that something was a lot of damn bad ploughing. I know that the horse plough, especially the single furrow, does better work than the multi-furrow tractor plough. But I also know that it is possible, and not too difficult, for a good ploughman to do good work with a tractor plough. In this matter I claim to speak with authority, for I was, and could be again if need be, both a good horse ploughman and a good tractor ploughman.

But to-day there must be far too many engineers messing about in farming England and not enough ploughmen. As my companion put it to me when we passed one example of lazy carelessness, "Tain't that it's just bad, it's bloody awful." And so it was. Cut and cover, anything'll do as long as it looks black, pig troughs galore, and frank unashamed misses for chains at a stretch.

All very well for me to criticize," someone will say, and that same someone will be almost sure to add, "it doesn't pay to plough well nowadays." Which is a fallacy which needs to be exposed. When times are bad and prices low, if you decide to plough your land it is more necessary than ever that you should plough well. For while a good crop at a low price may pay, a poor crop at a low price never can pay. And bad slovenly ploughing never yet brought a good crop of anything, save weeds.

But what an illustration of the state of farming is the all-too-common remark that it doesn't pay to do something or other. It doesn't pay to haul dung, to do up water meadows, to lay hedges, to trim banks, even to plough decently. It just shows what a mercenary nation we have become, when we allow all the pride and gusto to vanish from our oldest industry: for reading *English Panorama* by Thomas Sharp has just informed me that our ancestors were able to take a longer view. In writing of the Renaissance Period, and of the landscape planning and tree planting which took place after John Evelyn published his *Sylva* to show how careless the nation had become over its timber, I find this comment on the timber planting which subsequently took place all over England:

"Of all the works ever undertaken in the history of civilization this surely was one of the noblest. And enjoying it we should

surely now praise famous men and compare for our humility's sake this long term policy of a hundred years with our own pitiful ones of five."

But do we compare anything for our humility's sake? Not on your life. Instead, we destroy in a few short years hundreds of beautiful trees which better men than we planted with no thought of material gain, and our legislators' idea of a long term agricultural policy is to grant a few small cash sops here and there, and to hope for the best. And, as far as I can see, the more they yap about their long term policy the shorter and more elusive it becomes. Gosh! How I would like to see a law passed that every candidate for a rural constituency should be forced to deposit with his £150 a signed and witnessed affidavit that he had with his own hands either

(a) Milked twenty cows.

(b) Spread an acre of dung heaps.

(c) Singled an acre of sugar beet.

(d) Done any other little job which a good farm labourer does in one day.

Then politicians would be qualified to talk about a *long* term agricultural policy, and I would bet money that we would damn soon have one on the statute book. Aye, long before their blisters healed.

XXV

Does any one want to see British farming flourish? The town food consumer does not; neither does the town manufacturer; and, as far as one can see, very few folk in high places would welcome such a state of things. Of course, none of these people wants to see our home farming die. That would inconvenience them. Instead, they want it kept just alive, so that the beautiful cheap playground of the countryside is available for them according to their several desires. To ensure which, they are all willing to grant the farming industry the lowest possible minimum dole which will enable it just to keep going. But enable it to flourish and produce the maximum possible from our land? No, a thousand times no!

One piece of evidence in support of that view which I am coming across continually in provincial towns is the curious twist to be found on the list at most Chambers of Commerce dinners: "Industry and

Agriculture" !!! I have always looked upon agriculture as one of our most important industries, but that toast shows that in the eyes of most townsfolk it does not come into that category at all. It is something different, something queer, something over which to be sentimental, something to which to pay lip service only; but only a very small minority of people in this country, apart from those engaged in it, look upon it as an industry, and wish it to be treated as such on all fours with other industries.

But, as I say, no one wants to see it collapse utterly, mainly because of its charm and cheap recreational facilities. Only the other day a friend who has retired to the country asked me whether I knew of any rough shooting to be let cheaply. "Of course," he said, "there's too much grass in this district. You're to blame for that, my lad. I should want to rent some arable. I say, why don't you farmers plough more land?"

"Why?" I asked. "Just to provide you with some cheap and good shooting? You make arable farming pay, and farmers will plough gladly. But that wouldn't suit your book at all."

"Of course it would," he argued.

"Quite sure?" I asked. "Just think a bit. You might not mind your housekeeping bills being raised, but don't you see that a prosperous community of farmers would not want to let their shooting to you. They themselves would be able to afford to shoot over the land they farmed, a monstrous state of things. It is only bad times which forces the majority of farmers to permit other people to enjoy the pleasures which their land provides."

XXVI

Wherever I travel in the country-side this May I see a mass of fruit blossom. Last year's frosts prevented millions of fruit trees from bearing anything, but this season they seem to have decided to make up for lost time. Orchard trees, garden trees, and even the odd come-by chance fruit tree in the wood or hedgerow, all are ablaze, and if frost does not come the crop should be a bumper.

I said as much to a fruit-grower the other day, but he informed me that a bumper crop of fruit depended on something else in addition to an absence of frost, something which, he informed me, was in too short supply. Apparently, there is a shortage of bees in Britain to-day, and the fruit-grower now must needs be a bee-keeper as well,

mainly to ensure the pollination of the fruit blossom, the honey crop being a secondary consideration. Which just illustrates once again how interdependent the various branches of farming always are.

Another feature of the country-side just now is the song of the birds. I drove up into Grovely Wood this evening to seek some advice from an old woodman about planting a windbreak on one side of my garden. Of course, I knew that late May was an absurd time to plant, but, having decided to have a windbreak I wanted it immediately, if not sooner. My mentor lives in a cottage in the middle of the wood, which this evening was surrounded by rabbits at play, and birds in full chorus. I remarked on the latter, and he said, "Aye! They birds do put in a longish day thease time o' year. Zim to be main keen on workin' awver-time. They doan't git many hours' sleep. Eestiddy marnin' they nightingales were zingin' lovely. I do like to yer they."

When we came down to business he gave me lots of good advice. To plant anything now, he said, would be "ziful waste o' labour an' trees. You maun bide patient till November, maister. Then, I 'low I can set 'ee to rights. Anythin' else'll be jist voolishness." Thank goodness I have sense enough to appreciate and take valuable disinterested advice when it is offered in such charming fashion.

I do love the way in which these old countrymen speak their minds on subjects concerning which they have the right of long experience to speak with authority. Only last week I met a lady who gave me a delightful illustration of this. She and her husband had recently settled in Wiltshire in an old farmhouse, which boasted a rather large garden. They decided to do the work in the garden themselves, partly because they could not afford a whole-time gardener and could not procure the services of a part-time one, and partly, of course, because they were ardent beginners at the game. However, they had managed either to coax or to bribe, probably both, an old village expert to call round in the evening and act as foreman. Here is how the lady described his methods.

"He's like a schoolmaster, or perhaps a bully. He treats us both as nitwits. The other evening we were in the greenhouse discussing what to grow in it, and he suddenly fixed us both with a stern stare, and said, "Now I wonder whether you two could be trusted wi' a cucumber? Well, I'll chance it, and let 'ee 'ave one, but mind, you maun promise never to goo away for a week-end together."

Like wise people they promised. So now I see them at week-ends throughout this summer one perhaps at the sea or on the golf course, but always the other guarding the cucumber plant. Such loyalty deserves not only good salad but some salmon to go with it.

SUMMER

I

JUST when does spring end and summer begin? Most people, I imagine, do not consider that summer has really arrived until Midsummer Day, June 24th. In many minds, no doubt, the beginning of summer coincides with the first shedding of winter underwear, thus varying each year according to the temperature. Possibly others call it summer when the cuckoo changes his tune. The Press would seem to date it somewhere in the middle of May, when cricket supplants football in its sporting columns, and when, after eight or nine months of labour and excitement, the harried minds of the regular fillers of pool coupons are at rest. To me, a farmer, summer's arrival is printed in cocksfoot.

This is the way of it. May comes in to greet a green world, and then, nine years out of ten, the weather proceeds to do its damndest to make that world less green. Even when the sun shines, a cold wind accompanies it, and frost plays havoc in the dark. During the first week or two of May a farmer rides, drives, or walks over his farm wondering just how it can be possible that he will be haymaking in early June. And then, somewhere about the fifteenth of May, never later than the twentieth, he will see that the cocksfoot in his pastures is shooting up to head. For myself, although I know that most of the experts disagree with me, I hate cocksfoot. It grows a long top but no bottom. One week it isn't there at all, and next week it is panicking to be cut; and, unless it be cut the moment an odd head or two is showing, one might just as well try to make hay out of steel knitting-needles. Consequently, when I sowed down nearly two hundred acres of my farm to pasture some ten years ago I gave cocksfoot a miss, much to the mystification of the seedsman from whom I bought my seeds mixture.

Quite definitely I have never regretted that omission, but so persistent is cocksfoot grass that it has spread here and there all over the farm, the seeds being carried from the older pasture in the hay fed to the cattle on the newer ones during the winter. So to-day, May 17th, I found here and there a head of cocksfoot just bursting through the

stem of the plant. Which means that haymaking cannot be so very far away, or rather that summer is here once more.

Somehow I think that the majority of farmers are not very enamoured of summer. The minor reason is that this season of the year means the most work and worry and the least sport; for games are not sport, and neither otter-hunting nor fishing attracts many farmers. Even I, who am a keen fisherman, should put the seasons in this order of popularity—Autumn, Winter, Spring, Summer. The major reason is because summer exposes a farmer's previous mistakes, and permits no repair of them. What is done, is done, and the result is plain for all to see in either good crops or bad ones. There can be little or no planning for the future until after the harvest of the planning of the past. That scamped cultivation, that hollow seed-bed, those rabbits which were not killed last winter, that avaricious over-cropping, those niggardly dressings of both dung and artificial manure—the shameful results of all these and many more mistakes of omission and commission are now printed plain in the fields for all to read. Summer has gone to press, it is now too late to correct the farming proofs, and not until the autumn edition can they be either amended, erased, or forgotten. And the devil of it is that during summer the readers of the book of the country-side are multiplied a hundredfold. Well, it is to be hoped that most of them will concentrate on the really good pages, of which every farmer has written a few.

II

I find that I have an apology to make to Cumberland farmers. In a recent broadcast, while trying to pay a compliment to the hardy qualities of the Herdwick breed of sheep, I pronounced the word, "Herdick." In consequence, one fell farmer wrote to me that the "w" is not silent. For this mistake I apologized humbly, but could not refrain from inquiring whether, in the stress of dipping, shearing, marketing, or some other worrying job, these sheep were not sometimes referred to as "Herdicks."

But would the champions of this excellent breed of mountain sheep let me wriggle out in that fashion? Not a bit of it. No less a gentleman than the secretary of the Herdwick Sheep Breeders' Association has now taken issue with me over this question of the occasional permission of a silent "w":

"We never on any occasion, not even in the heat of a 'fratch,' or when we look on the beer when it is brown, drop the 'w' in Herdwick."

Not for one moment do I doubt this gentleman's assertion—any man whose "w" is unaffected by beer, and who can view a "fratch" with equanimity commands my profound respect. Just what a "fratch" is I do not know for certain, but never again shall my omission of the "w" in Herdwick lead me into a fratch with any of my Cumberland friends.

These old country words are rapidly passing from our speech, even from the speech of the younger generation of countryfolk. Such things must be, I suppose, but I do wish that the effect of an expensive modern education was not quite so drastic in another way. When a farmer's son spends four or five impressionable years at a public school it is only to be expected that he will discard many of the old dialect words of his rural childhood, and, of course, acquire many new and more cultured ones. But must he shed all the rural burr from his speech, and adopt quite such an offensive *tone* of voice?

Whenever I hear it, and recently I've been hearing it far too frequently for my liking, I am reminded of the story of the farmer's daughter who left the farm to work in London. Six months later she returned home for a short holiday, so sophisticated, so refined, and so ignorant of anything on the farm that her family could hardly bear with her. The one-time dairymaid was now afraid of cows. She turned up her nose at her home-cured bacon. The mention of "dung" offended her deeply. However, in due time the farm retaliated. She noticed a rake lying on the garden path, and, walking towards it, said, "And what do you call that curious-looking tool?" At that moment she put her dainty foot on the teeth of the rake, and the handle flew up and hit her in the face, whereupon she said, "Damn the rake."

An old story, I'm afraid, but the arrogant and objectionable tone of voice which so many farmers' sons seem to acquire at school these days insists that I tell it.

III

The chief characteristic of all land save that which suffers from sea or river erosion or earthquakes is its permanence. In other words, men come and go, but the land remains, unaltered. And yet this very

obvious truth never ceases to surprise me. I well remember returning home after an absence of some four years in Western Canada, and being amazed that the farm was just the same as it had been when I left it. There was a new house or two, a few all old timber friends of my boyhood had disappeared, and here and there a new fence had been erected, but the broad outline of the farm was unchanged. Every fold in the downs was in the same place, the rabbits were still inhabiting the same burrows; and I, a young man who had in his opinion seen and done so much in a short time, felt humbled when faced by such permanent majesty.

These thoughts returned to me the other day on discovering that my farm was mentioned in Domesday Book. In 1086 the town of "Wiltune," now Wilton, had four mills, and was evidently more important than it is to-day. Just west of Wiltune was Dechemitune, which is now my farm of Ditchampton. At that date it was held by the Bishop of Bath, and the land was good for so many oxen, ploughs, and villeins. It occurs to me that it is high time that another Domesday Book was compiled, or must this wait for another conqueror of England? Perish the thought! Besides, surely the comparison between the new and the old records would be invaluable? For instance, at the moment instead of my farm being good for so many ploughs and oxen, it is good for about eighty dairy cows and an outdoor milking machine.

But modern life is such a rush that few of us can find time to investigate the ancient history of our own country-side. There is, somewhere on the Great North Road—I think it is in Yorkshire—a signpost pointing to "Pity Me." I can remember passing it, but such was my business haste that to my shame I never stopped to inquire just who required pity many years ago or the reason for his or her lamentable condition. And even of my own district I am disgracefully ignorant. There is, in the Chalk Valley, or rather the valley of the river Ebble in South Wilts, a village called Alvediston. One of my neighbours says that it is so named because in the days before motor transport it was "a hell of a distance from anywhere." But this I doubt, because he is a great joker. And why is there so often an "e" tacked on to "chalk" in that valley? In an old hunting map I find Broadchalk and Bowerchalk; in the modern ordnance map and in the local papers there is an "e" added to each word. Are we modern Wiltshire folk equal in snobbishness to these persons who add an "e" to good old English surnames? We may be, but, thanks be, the tele-

phone directory puts us in our place, for in it I find the "Broadchalk" exchange.

Here is yet another instance of my shameful ignorance of my own county. Last Sunday afternoon, one of the loveliest Sunday afternoons imaginable, I discovered a Wiltshire village which was entirely new to me, and which boasted scarcely any typical Wiltshire features. In fact, although it is in Wilts, it is almost pure Gloucestershire, or rather, pure Cotswold. A very good friend had recently bought a country cottage in the extreme northern corner of Wiltshire, and had promised me tea if I would drive up and give him my expert opinion. So last Sunday I drove from Salisbury to Swindon through a green England, and under a perfect blue sky without the smallest blemish of cloud. Soon after Swindon was left behind I saw the Vale country spread before me. Through Cricklade, a sharp right turn, and then a mile or so of country lane brought me to my destination, the village of Marston Meysey.

Was there ever more luscious name for any village? Why, even to say it makes one think of strawberries and cream and other similar perfections! And is there anything more rural or more lovely than that Vale country-side with its Cotswold style farm-houses and cottages? The sun shone on grey stone walls and mullioned windows. The pub was named "The Spotted Cow"—think of it! There was no wind; only a very occasional car disturbed the peace of it all; and all around was the green and blaze of late May. It was, indeed, truly rural, and how we all revelled in it!

IV

The country-side is looking beautiful just now, in marked contrast to its appearance last May. Lush is the best word to describe its bountiful promise. A nice word, "lush"; even to say it makes one think of warm, wet rains on rich green grass. As a result of recent warm rains growth is well forward and farm work well in hand. Last year, owing to the drought, everything was not only late but topsyturvy. I remember saying as much to an old carter, who replied, "Ay, I 'low 'tis. We ain't vinished barley zowin' eet. I ain't niver sowed barley later'n mangle'avore, but then ivery year we do do zummat different."

In that last remark lies, I think, one of the greatest attractions of farming by comparison with most other callings—its infinite variety. Goodness knows, more often than not this is the cause of serious financial loss to farmers, but, even so, it has its charms. If one could farm to a set time-table with a given series of operations the job would be less worrying and more profitable, but, oh, how dull! I said as much to a friend the other day, and he agreed, pointing out that it was the glorious or inglorious uncertainty of farming in this country which had resulted in the industry still being composed mainly of small individualistic business enterprises.

"All other industries, even the retail distributive trade," he said, "are fast falling into the hands of big business. The little man just cannot compete with the large block of capital. But in farming, still the individualistic farmer can not only compete but in most cases beat the large limited liability company."

While I was pondering over the very few company farming enterprises I knew of which had achieved even a moderate success, he proceeded to amplify his argument.

"Tisn't only the uncertainty of the weather," he said. "It's that allied to the uncertainty of any settled agricultural policy over a term of years. The private investor will never put his money into farming companies until he can be assured that the national farming policy will be maintained in a certain direction for at least a decade. And as that will never happen until the nation has been very hungry for a spell, British farming will continue mainly in the hands of the small individualistic capitalist."

I have since thought quite a bit about this conversation, and have come to the conclusion that the large company farm has yet another handicap. As there can be no set time-table, which the works manager, so to speak, could be forced to obey under pain of the sack, it must follow that only the exceptionally gifted works manager could possess the necessary initiative to alter his time-table to suit altered conditions. And, generally speaking, that sort of farming individual would be using that initiative on his own farm. He would be too good a man to work for any one, no matter how large the salary might be.

But, even in farming as it is run in this country, there is need for almost every type of person, save perhaps the lazy whiner, and success in life cannot always be judged solely in material terms. Making money, getting on, rising from paid man to master man, increasing from small holder to large farmer—all these things leave their mark.

Again and again I noticed a great difference between men who have got on rapidly and their one-time companions who by comparison have been lacking in ambition. The former have acquired many material assets, greater material comfort, and greater respect from the community, but in almost every case they seem to have lost the precious gift of laughter. In fact the majority can hardly raise a smile. By the expression on their faces it is plain to see that success is a grim business. In contrast the latter, although they are still perhaps in the two-pounds-a-week class, have a smile for everybody, much joy in loud laughter every day in the week, and evidently live a life of infinite zest. Any man who has achieved that habit of mind after sixty years on this earth must be looked upon as a success.

V

About a week ago we managed to sow the grass seeds in the seven acres of oats on the reclaimed gorse land. Incidentally these oats have come up remarkably suent from the hand broadcasting, there being only one bad miss in the whole field. Moreover, they look amazingly well, showing a nice dark blue-green, and growing ahead every day. Which surprises me, for the soil is fluffy, and obviously poor. Evidently the top-dressing of kainit and nitro-chalk has been found palatable. This land on top of the downs is deficient in most plant foods, but I am convinced that it is most deficient in potash, and therefore that the kainit is mainly responsible for this good start.

Another thing which surprises me is the frequency with which I visit this field, for I am well aware that it will be the least profitable, or rather the most unprofitable field on the farm this season. Even if both the yield and price of oats were double what they will be, this field would still lose money. Yet, every chance I get, I drive up to it, and admire it. But, be the loss great or small, the fact remains that a piece of land which had never grown anything before save gorse, briars, thorns, and rabbits, is now producing something worth while, and I am the man responsible for this alteration. So, during this summer, although I shall get my living from the other acres, these seven will have all my heart. Unfair perhaps, illogical certainly, but I think quite understandable.

There is just time to have another peep at them before dark, so here goes.

VI

Wonders will never cease. If folk in high places don't watch out, this old country seems likely to adopt an agricultural policy with a purpose, something which has not happened save in war-time since the repeal of the corn laws, that agricultural policy which was devoted to and succeeded in the purpose of procuring cheap food for town consumers. Still greater wonder, the proposed policy has a twofold purpose, not only to bring about greater food production from our farming land, but also something which is far more important, to build up still greater productive powers in the future. Either is very definitely against the accepted rules. Wonders will never cease.

Such were my first reactions this morning on reading in my newspaper the details of the Minister of Agriculture's proposals in the House of Commons the previous day, and the more I studied them the more wonderful they became. Why? Simply because for the first time in my life a Minister of Agriculture has had the audacity to admit that great farming truth—THAT THE MAIN OBJECT OF THE PLOUGH IN BRITISH FARMING DURING PEACE IS AND SHOULD BE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF OUR GRASSLAND. Such a step forward in agricultural policy surely merits capitals.

As one who in a very small way has been stressing this point during recent years, I must express my satisfaction. At long last we have official admission that grass is an important crop, that growing it is nothing to be ashamed of but rather something to be proud of, and that the best place to store potential fertility in most of our farming acres is underneath the turf of *good* pasture land. As I say, wonders will never cease.

There will no doubt be some criticism that these proposals should have come earlier in order that a greater acreage of grain might have been sown this spring, but I think that this would have been a mistake. As I view the position the powers that be must needs make an annual bet against war in connection with our farming policy.

What I mean is that to grow a greatly increased acreage of grain during peace would be to weaken our home farming as a fourth line of defence. Each year while peace remains, no matter how precariously, in the saddle of history, our grain-growing must be just that amount which our animal husbandry can comfortably carry as a by-

product. Therefore, when May comes, the annual bet against a war-time famine before the necessary sixteen months can bring about an increased grain harvest from our land must be made.

This year once again, rightly or wrongly, that gamble has been taken, for not until September 1940 can any appreciable increase be expected in the amount of human food produced from the farming land of this country. I for one consider it to be a justifiable risk, especially now that it is not a blind one. For to-day we have two safeguards—firstly, a national food storage to bridge the gap between the date of an outbreak of war and the earliest possible increase in home food production; and secondly, an agricultural policy with the avowed object of ensuring that when a greater productive effort is required our farming acres will be in a fit state to make it. Wonders will never cease.

Which means, I sincerely hope, that the powers that be will hasten to carry this championship of grass to its logical conclusion. While peace obtains they, very rightly, would have farmers improve the quality of their pastures. This must mean increased live-stock farming, a branch of farming which to-day comprises some three-quarters of the whole industry of British agriculture. But unless those improved pastures are well stocked they will soon deteriorate, and thus the national investment in them will be lost. Therefore, the next step in our agricultural policy, one which the majority of farmers have been praying for far too long, must surely be directed to putting live-stock farming in this country into a more profitable condition.

However, even if this wonder be not forthcoming immediately, let us be grateful, not for small mercies, but for a very big one—the public and official recognition of the value of our grassland. So thankful was I when I first read of it, that I turned up Psalm 118, and read verse 22 with great satisfaction. Here it is:

“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”

With reference to to-day's agricultural politics for “stone” read “grass,” and for “builders” read “woefully blind politicians.”

VII

A correspondent in a west-country weekly mentions “Dew-bit” as the name given to the first meal of the day in rural Dorset. I have

never come across this anywhere before, but it is so apt that I trust Dorset folk will never let it die out. True, nowadays only the minority are awake with the dew; but, even so, why should not the early morning tea and biscuit of modern society be known as the "Dew-bit"? Anyway, I do suggest that Dorset hotels should try to keep this attractive name alive, and that their staff should always inquire of visitors at what hour in the morning they would like their "Dew-bit."

VIII

As I worked in my study this afternoon I was conscious that there was a tennis-party in full swing outside. In duty bound I went out on the lawn to play my part as host during tea, my excuses that my presence at a young people's party could well be omitted having been unaccepted by my womenfolk. Even so I still stick to it that my view is correct, for recently I have been continually reminded that I have arrived in the old buffer class. A good adjective that, to describe one who has attained the middle-aged spread: for not only does one's girth warrant its use but one's chief function in life seems to be to play the role of buffer for one's young people between the harsh discipline of life and their enthusiasms and foolishness. The unfailing sign of one's attainment of the buffer state is when young people of both sexes, especially the male, invariably accord one deference and respect, and for a year or two now this has been granted to me in good measure. So, choosing a sound-looking deck-chair to accommodate my sixteen stone, I resigned myself to the politeness of the company, whilst I admired the girls' slim, scantily clad beauty, and envied the lads their flat tummies and easy agility. Time was when I passed the tea-cups and fagged the tennis-balls, but now I sit, occasionally bragging of my past prowess to people too young to be able to question it.

Tea over, I lit a pipe, and prepared to watch the game; and it was then that I noticed a curious difference between this generation of young tennis-players and my own at a similar age. They have all been trained correctly in the art of tennis; we were not, but acquired it under the spur of competition. The resulting standard of play is about equal, the modern being more classy, but ours quite as efficient. But the difference in the attitude of youthful players to the game is very

marked. In my day, when it was not our turn to play tennis, we keenly watched the prowess of our contemporaries on the court, derided their bad shots, applauded their good ones, and noted any marked improvement in any player's game. Now it seems that all young people can make a fairly good showing at tennis, enjoy being asked to tennis-parties, at which, when their turn comes, they play tennis—after all, an occasional set is expected of them. But when they are not playing they scarcely bother to look at the court at all, being much more interested in talking to each other. I do not say that this is a retrograde step, but I insist that it is now the fashion and a great difference from that of thirty years ago. After a few minutes I found myself to be the only person on the lawn who was watching the tennis. Ah, well, here apparently, is yet another role for the old buffer.

IX

Once again in a time of difficulty and danger the population of this country is turning to the land for succour. To-day townsfolk are afraid, mortally afraid, of two things, war and famine. Consequently they desire the impossible—that the dwindling acres of farming land in this island shall produce more food and that more and more of those acres shall be given over to military purposes. Every day one hears complaints that the authorities are taking fertile farming land instead of waste land for the latter purpose, and that its food-producing powers are thus entirely destroyed. As the needs of the air arm require the greatest acreage I visited an aerodrome to-day to see exactly what was happening.

From its inception the Air Ministry has done its best to combat this charge of wasting land. In the early days the landing-grounds attached to a military aerodrome were either let to farmers for grazing or haymaking; and, when aeroplanes were not too numerous, this arrangement worked fairly well. But with the recent rapid increase in aeroplanes and training activity it had to be discontinued. Grazing live stock were too often a hindrance and sometimes a danger; long grass spoiled the landing facilities; and in some instances haymaking meant considerable fire risk. So, with the best of goodwill in the world, it looked as though the Air Force would be proven guilty of wasting a tremendous acreage of useful land.

However, once again I found that the times had produced the men and methods required. I inspected the work of the grass-drying farmer, who now manages to satisfy the requirements of the Air Force and at the same time to save the total produce of the landing-grounds in a valuable and marketable condition. Never have two entirely different businesses worked together more harmoniously. The Air Force requires a neatly trimmed grass lawn as a landing-ground; the grass-drying farmer needs short young grass as his raw material. The former wants the least possible obstruction on the ground to aeroplane manoeuvres; the latter's maximum hindrance is a tractor hauling a chain harrow, a roller, a manure-distributor, or a cut-lift mower, either combination being capable of easy and quick removal when occasion requires. The greater the tonnage of produce removed from the land the better the landing-ground and the better the farmer's balance sheet.

Moreover, under the new arrangement between modern aircraft and modern agriculture, even the question of fertility has been considered. The former pays the farmer for the task of continuous cutting and removing the summer growth of grass, but at the same time insists in his contract that he shall dress the land adequately with suitable artificial fertilizers. I saw the effect of this on virgin downland this afternoon, where the alteration in the character of the herbage was amazing. I found rye-grasses and clovers growing in profusion, and evidence everywhere that this modern practice of farming aerodromes is performing that marvellous feat of producing national income and at the same time enhancing the value of national capital. There are few businesses to-day which can make so proud a boast. Moreover, this downland is now employing more men than in the old farming days.

The capacity of the average drying plant is from three to four hundredweights of dried meal per hour. The short grass is fed slowly by hand on to a mechanical feeder, and takes about twenty minutes to pass through the dryer, where at the delivery end it comes out as dry as chips, but still retaining its green colour. From there it goes into a mill which delivers a fine green flour into a paper bag on scales. This concentrated product finds a ready market with the manufacturers of animal and poultry feeding-stuffs. Its price varies according to analysis, but good quality green meal up to the required standard fetches somewhere about £10 per ton. When one realizes that the average landing-ground comprises some three hundred acres, and that in a fair season even downland can be made to yield three tons of

dried meal per acre, it is obvious that the nation cannot afford to waste such a valuable by-product of national defence.

To my mind both the Air Ministry and the modern farmer should be congratulated on finding a way to make the land of England do two things at once, and both of them well.

X

Farming conversation this last week has been concerned not a little with the proposed subsidy of £2 per acre for ploughing up poor or worn-out pasture land between now and the end of next September. Here and there one heard adverse criticism. This sort of thing. "Catch me ploughing up any pasture for two quid an acre." "What good's that to me? I haven't got any pasture that's been down for seven years." It isn't enough money to pay a man to wreck a good pasture, or to recompense him for the cost of ploughing-out and improving a poor one. While the border-line cases, the men who have some poor grass-land which has been down six years only, wailed loud and long.

But in the main there was general satisfaction at this first step in the new policy. The majority of farmers seem to recognize and appreciate that this is not primarily intended to help farmers but to help the land. That, while the proposed payment would not cover the total cost of ploughing up, manuring, and re-seeding an indifferent pasture, a job which costs about £6 per acre, it would in many cases make that improvement worth while to the man who made it. That at last the paramount value of grassland has been admitted officially. And, greatest point of all, that this Government money would not be largely confined to any one district, but could and probably would be made to spread itself fairly over the whole country.

It occurs to me that before setting the plough to work in any pasture this summer the farmer should consider carefully just whether by so doing he will give the nation value for money in increased future productive power of the land so ploughed, and at the same time do his own pocket, if not a great deal of good, certainly no material harm.

Just what type of grassland ought to be ploughed under this policy? Many people, farmers as well as townsfolk, will be inclined to argue,

"As much as possible," but it may be that neither the very good pasture nor the very poor should be ploughed in too much of a hurry. I cannot see many farmers hurrying to plough up really first-class pasture, which is fenced and watered, and of a quality to command to-day a rent of £2 per acre or over; nor do I think that this policy is intended to effect this change. Neither do I think that it will pay either the nation or the farmer for too wide an expanse of very poor pasture to be so treated.

It is not correct to assume that what is now unprofitable grassland will automatically become profitable and fertile arable as soon as the plough has been put into it. Indeed, there are some lands which are less of a liability to both the nation and the farming industry as damn poor pasture than they would be as dog poor arable. I once heard a farmer describe a tract of such land in this fashion. "Well, you can write that off. 'Tain't land, 'tis just space."

Even so, as damn poor pasture it does possess the capability of one arable food crop should need arise, but if that crop be taken in peace-time, what then? Instead of a field of poor grass which was admittedly of no profit and no liability, there will be a field of stubble, equally of no profit, and of considerable liability in the immediate future. Stubble cannot be just left; something must be done with it.

To my mind that class of land will not and should not be expected to feel the plough until something more definite as to the future of farming is forthcoming from the powers that be. Until there is an assured and profitable market for a great increase of live-stock products, notably from hurdled sheep, I do not see how many of our poorer hill pastures on light soils can be improved. Granted, the plough is the only way to improve them, but the plough must be followed by the dung and feet of the folded flock, a practice on such land on which only a millionaire could afford to embark under present conditions. To plough up such land, and take a cereal crop, perhaps two, is to leave that land in a worse state than before.

Until more hope for live-stock farming, particularly hurdled sheep farming, is justified, I think it will be mostly the medium quality pasture land which will come up as a result of the new proposals. The first-class pasture will and should remain down, save where it has become live-stock sick, and the lightest and poorest likewise. But in between there is a large acreage of not very good pasture which was decidedly useful arable not so very many years ago. When the bottom dropped out of arable farming after the war this land was seeded down, existed

as good pasture for a few years, and subsequently has deteriorated into moderate pasture. This type of grassland can be improved tremendously by ploughing up, taking one or at most two cereal crops, and then re-seeding with a proper mixture of grass and clover; and in my view it is to this end that the new policy is directed.

Moreover, most farmers, I think, can manage to tackle a moderate acreage in this fashion without any drastic upheaval in their live-stock farming, and without any greatly increased expense for equipment. Many of us have been doing this for several years, myself included. Now, after consultation with my foreman, I have decided to set the plough going over some thirty or forty acres immediately after hay-making, an acreage which would have been 50 per cent, less had this new policy not come to pass.

XI

I have recently been investigating bees, with the result that I have acquired several new friends, an alarming amount of information, and, thanks be, only one sting, and that not in a vital spot. The reason for all this is because I have a mercenary mind, and was amazed to read in some agricultural statistics that the honey production of this country was worth well over two hundred thousand pounds sterling per annum. That there was money from bees was obvious, but was there money in bee-keeping? The rapidly increasing net of regulations which encompass the cow-keeper and the rapacious appetite of cows for cake and meal which have to be paid for in hard cash have taken all the joy and most of the profit from modern dairying. Besides, everybody in farming, landlord, farmer, and labourer, hates the job of milk production and everything connected with that dirty animal, the cow, which produces both milk and mess on seven days in every week. Moreover, after a quarter-century of dairy farming without a break, I was definitely bored with cows and yearned for a change. The thought of keeping some live-stock which could feed over the hedge on my neighbour's land seemed extraordinarily attractive. Why, therefore, should not I keep bees, let them work busily on my behalf, while I sat in the sun at ease listening to the little beggars' buzzing. So, although bees are the one class of farm live-stock of which I have no knowledge, and

of which I am desperately afraid, I made it my business to call upon some of my bee-keeping neighbours and risk a few stings in search of profitable information.

Alas, as a result I have decided to stick to cows, for I soon discovered that bee-keeping is anything but a lazy man's occupation, and that weather can handicap the bee-keeper just as much as any other farmer. Bees, apparently, cannot work unless it is warm, and some seasons the weather plays all sorts of tricks with them. Unseasonal warmth in early March will wake them up from their winter sleep, and then cold weather in April will send them back to bed again. Moreover, often at the end of May the temperature is such that they are only working a very short day, and the old proverb of a swarm of bees in May being worth a load of hay is hopelessly inaccurate. Under such conditions, instead of the bees being busy making honey for their owner, he has to feed them with sugar syrup. I learned that usually the saleable crop of honey is made after that date being needed by the bees for their winter keep, which is why, to quote yet another proverb, a swarm of bees in July is not worth a butterfly.

But the thing which surprised me most was to discover that bee-keeping is not just the simple matter of owning some bees and taking the natural crop of honey which they and circumstances provide. During the winter months the bee-keeper is busy making equipment for the next summer, and during the summer he—often it is a she—is as busy as the worker bee. In spite of this bee-keepers generally are very friendly folk, seemingly only too willing to be bothered by people who are entirely ignorant of their business. They do not merely keep bees, they live bees, talk bees, and presumably dream about them at night.

As a novice bee-keeper you drive along a country lane, where, noticing a dozen hives, you decide to call upon a perfect stranger. He may be wealthy, he may be poor; he may be famous, he may be unknown; but immediately all his knowledge is at your disposal. The man whom you have known as a farm labourer or woodman is suddenly transformed into a most cultured individual, possessed of a collection of ancient bee books, and much lore of bees which he has gained by experience. The retired general with the fierce moustache, whom you have always looked upon as the man who shot them down in India and would like to repeat the process here, miraculously becomes a most friendly person, in fact a human being like yourself. Even the admitted bee expert, the man who has hundreds of hives, will tell

you all he knows eagerly. All will waste their time with you in the most charming fashion, not because they are bee experts, but because they love bees.

On a commercial basis bee-keeping is a scientific and complicated business. On some farms they are recorded in much the same fashion as either cows or pigs. The other day I met a man who breeds and sells pedigree queens to bee-keepers all over the country and beyond the seas. The foundation of his huge stock was a hive which some fourteen years ago produced five hundredweights of honey in three years without swarming. Apparently swarming upsets bees, and disturbs them from the real business of making honey, so that most bee-keepers try to prevent swarming by periodical examination of the hives and cutting of the queen cells. This new friend of mine believes in breeding from non-swarming strains, and to do this keeps a detailed record of each hive's activities. Moreover, he prefers to breed from stocks which are good-tempered, a practice which every one must applaud.

Warning me that many bee-keepers would criticize his ideas as nonsense he told me all sorts of things. That he loved bees. That he began with a lot of poultry and a few bees, but soon found that the bees were subsidizing the poultry, and so he scrapped the birds in favour of the insects. That he preferred a good field of charlock to one of white clover as pasturage for his bees. Again that he loved bees. That a vigorous queen bee laid from five to six thousand eggs daily. That it took twenty-one days to produce a perfect bee, a period which included the three days' incubation. That the bees had solved the sex problem and could by different feeding hatch either workers or queens from the same egg. Yet again that he loved bees. That the eggs of a virgin queen produced drones. That while he could not force bees to produce queens he could induce them to do so. That he sold three hundred queen bees last year. That the whole art of bee-keeping lay in three things. Firstly, in the careful selection of breeding stock; secondly, in the intelligent but generous application of sugar syrup; and thirdly, in the bee-keeper loving his bees. All these three maxims square with my experience with other farm live-stock, especially the second, for it has ever been my opinion that the manger is half the pedigree. Apparently, with bees it is more: for, without a good store of food for the hive, they lack confidence to work for the future.

The profit and loss account of bee-keeping must, of course, vary with the season and the bee-keeper, but to-day bees are undoubtedly the most attractive form of live-stock for the new-comer to the country-

side to play with as a hobby. Pigs are perhaps more soothing, certainly less trouble, and possibly more profitable; but too often they are apt to communicate their presence at the bottom of the garden to one's nose, with the result that they may make for their keepers more enemies than friends. With bees there is no such drawback. On the contrary my recent researches show that there is a freemasonry amongst bee-keepers to which the investment of about five pounds will enable any one to gain admission. This sum will purchase a hive filled with bees, a smoker, and a veil; an equipment which will provide its owner with endless interest, much pleasure, a few stings, some honey which is honey, the wherewithal to make mead, and a host of good friends.

The two last are perhaps the most valuable returns. Any one who has ever drunk a glass of good mead in a bee-keeper's cottage will agree that our ancestors of years ago knew a thing or two; and any one who keeps bees knows the friends which he or she has made in consequence. For bees are no respecters of persons. They will on occasion sting anybody, from the highest to the lowest in the social scale. For that reason alone many of our rural districts would be greatly improved by still more bees, for obviously it was the honey bee who first discovered that:

The colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady
Are sisters *under* their skins

XII

How the year slips by! Already the show season is upon us, and the Bath and West only a week or so away. Which reminds me of a delightful story of one visitor to an agricultural show. He bore a good name, and lived in a small country house in the district where the show was being held. Unfortunately he was a trifle weak in the upper story, not to the extent that he must become an inmate of an asylum, but sufficiently so that he employed a private attendant to look after him.

Most days he was as sane as the next man, and so he visited the show, where he managed to lose his keeper for some hours. The implement section, with its bright green and red and blue paint, buzzing of engines, and clatter of elevators, fascinated him. At the first stand the

smart salesman, seeing this aristocratic gentleman watching a machine very intently, inquired if he were interested in it. He was, very much so, and in a few minutes had ordered the machine, and signed on the dotted line. He continued this procedure from stand to stand, and then, saying nothing to his keeper when they subsequently met, went home, having ordered thousands of pounds' worth of implements and thoroughly enjoyed his day.

A week or two later up the lane towards his house came binders, elevators, drills, wagons, carts, and all the rest, and then, of course, the whole story came out. I cannot believe this tale to be true, but set it down as I heard it. If it be true the culprit has both my sympathy and admiration. I should love to let myself go in the matter of buying every implement I could possibly use, but the lightness of my pocket forbids.

XIII

Every countryman of my acquaintance is firmly convinced that ever since 1921 the country-side has been sacrificed by politicians on the altar of town interests, but this afternoon I learned that sometimes the countryman does get a little of his own back. I was visiting a town friend, who owns a most delightful country cottage in Hampshire. It was evident that originally this had been two cottages, which she had purchased cheaply and converted very expensively into a most charming house. From what she told me and from what I could see for myself it was plain that she had spent at least ten times the purchase price on improvements, but her tales of how the local builder, carpenter, brick-layer, decorator, and Jack-of-all-trades had handled her gave me great joy.

"He's an old devil," she said. "But a great friend. He does just what he likes with me. His last triumph was up there."

Here she pointed to where the brick chimney disappeared through the oak-beamed roof of the lounge.

"I sent for him to fix a leaking tap. He did it, and then came in here to tell me what a wonderful job he'd made of it. Suddenly he clutched my shoulder, pointed to the roof, and said, 'See they bricks? Leanin'. Gwaine to valls. 'Coorse, if zo be as they valls on you, 'twun't matter. But supposin' they valls on one o' yer visitors. Thee't be summoned fur damages, an' mebbe 'ave to pay 'underds an' 'underds of pounds compensation.'"

Apparently, for fear the bricks should fall, she fell for it, and it cost her pounds and pounds. But in spite of the fact that every visit of this wily gentleman costs her money, she assured me that they are still good friends, and that she has never regretted one penny of her outlay on her rural home.

I wonder whether the Prime Minister has a country cottage.

XIV

Driving home from the Bath and West Show I could not help thinking how true it is that we are an illogical people! We seem to delight in paradox, and a comparatively recent illustration of this curious trait in the national character can be seen in our increasing regard for natural things. The more we become a nation of town-dwellers, the more we become a nation of country-lovers. The more we discard the horse as a help during our daily work, the more we use him as a companion during the day. The more plentiful becomes the supply of overseas produce, the more determined we seem to be to grow at least one blossom and two green peas. The more life becomes a business of pushing buttons, the more we yearn to achieve a backache by physical exertion. Few may be able to dig, but none is ashamed to try.

In short, to-day we are all gardeners, little or much, good, bad, or indifferent. Perhaps the best illustration of this change in our habits is to be seen in the flower tent at any agricultural show. That is, of course, if you can get in, for from opening time until closing time it is thronged with keenly interested gardeners of both sexes, all classes, and all ages. The huntin', shootin', and fishin' folk rub shoulders with the shop and factory-worker. The ancient jostles the child. The voice of the country mingles with Cockney. The Oxford accent, or possibly the B.B.C. tone, is garnished with dialects from Lancashire to Devon. The super-tax payer and the man on the dole crane side by side over the same rockery. Men and women eagerly purchase seeds and vow to accomplish the picture on the packet, completely forgetting the failures of the past.

There is, however, one great change in our gardening habits. In years gone by, while people of all classes may have had gardens, few were real gardeners. The Duchess of Mackackiack employed MacGregor, that dour Scot, to run her vast garden. She demanded perfection, was willing to pay for it, and in most cases obtained it. Occasionally she may have suggested to MacGregor that she would like to see

begonias in a certain spot instead of the customary geraniums. To which he replied, "Very good, Your Grace," and in due time begonias appeared. In such fashion she achieved formal perfection in her garden, but she was definitely not a gardener. She was merely the possessor of a well-kept garden.

Lower down the social scale the same sort of thing obtained. The middle-class permitted their hireling, James, to bed out year after year with geraniums, lobelia, and marguerites. The farmer besought that Admirable Crichton, the groom-gardener: "And for God's sake find time to do them damn' flower-beds, else the missus'll create, an' my life wun't be wuth livin'." The working-man in both town and country toiled in garden or allotment for mainly utilitarian results, because his small income demanded them. Only in the pot plant in a slum window, or in the glorious riot of untidy beauty in the small front flower-bed of the rural cottage garden could one see signs of the real gardener.

But now we are all gardeners, irrespective of wealth or class. There is a natural lust in all mankind to hold dominion over something, and we all seem to be convinced that the best way to satisfy that lust is to become a real gardener. No matter how small or how large the garden, it must now exhibit the personality of its owner. We do not seek perfection, we have grown to loathe formality, but we all insist on absolute personal dominion over our gardens.

The Duchess dirties her skirt and her hands as she plants some seedling which has caught her fancy. It is useless for MacGregor to suggest that he should perform the task, that his employer does not know the correct method, or that the plant is unsuited to the soil. For to-day MacGregor has lost his garden; it now belongs to the Duchess. The city worker now hies home to suburbia each evening, not merely to kiss his wife and perhaps to play tennis or golf, but to plant some rare specimen which he has purchased during his lunch-hour, or even to stick a row of peas. The town workman does likewise, and in his allotment will be found quite a sizeable patch devoted to the production of something which can neither be eaten nor turned into money. The farmer discovers that the geraniums or lobelia, which have graced the lawn since time out of mind, have been replaced by all sorts of flowers which are strange to him. He grumbles as is his right at both the change and its expense, but even his materialistic soul exults at the charm of the unexpected and the beauty of informality; while the displays of bloom at the village flower show informs him that his employees have followed suit.

I, being a farmer and therefore one of the world's worst gardeners, frankly admit that my wife has shown me that a garden can be a source of endless pleasure, interest, and satisfaction. At first I scoffed at her frantic efforts, which seemed to lead to needless expense and far too many colds. However, in a lordly way I decided to humour her. I put up with herbaceous borders and even a rockery, and it was not until she suggested a lily-pool that I struck. But all to no purpose, for the fibre of the modern gardener, especially of the female, is extraordinarily tough. So last winter an enthusiastic wife and a sceptical groom-gardener, aided by the scoffings of the husband of one and the employer of the other, busied themselves with the art and mystery of concrete. The result to-day is a small pool surrounded by a rockery. The cement work is obviously the work of the amateur, the design of the pool was evidently taken either from *Man Friday's* foot or the hip-bath of the Victorian era. But in it water-lilies are blooming and goldfish disport themselves gaily.

Most probably the gardening expert would say that it is all wrong, but who cares? We—here it should be noted that I have joined the select company—we are not gardening experts, we are gardeners. This is our pool, into which the carping critic shall descend, head first. The credit must be given to the lady in the case, but here a grateful husband publishes his thanks, which grow more and more sincere with every hour of the many which he spends in looking at the little bit of water in his own garden.

It is, I am sure, in this fashion that the great majority of us enjoy the garden to-day. Its size is immaterial, the great thing is that it enables us to change the countenance of a little patch of England to suit our will. Thus we satisfy our natural lust for dominion, and our desperate need for intimate contact with natural processes. Each succeeding year we contrive that in strolling round our little realms we shall discover something different, something new which we have brought into being. This year it is pyrethrums, next year it will be phlox, and the year after perhaps delphiniums. One day the pool may have bred a stream and possibly a small waterfall. From our dislike of formality the untidy charm of the wild garden may appear.

Who knows what the change will be? No one save that very ordinary human being, who has discovered in a garden the secret of true kingship, which is to rule absolutely by love and service. That is the real reason why to-day we are gardeners all.

XV

The popular remark concerning agricultural shows is to say that when you've seen one, you've seen 'em all. Very definitely this would not have been true of this year's Bath and West at Bridgwater the other week. For there I found two distinct innovations.

The first was an Army stand, which created a deal of interest. One saw countrymen of all ages eagerly examining machine-guns, and many of the younger ones seeking information on military matters. Somehow I think that most farming-folk will regret such an innovation at an agricultural show, but few would suggest that it was not a necessary exhibit in these troublous times. The interest it created seemed to show that, like the majority of Britons, countryfolk to-day are military minded, but definitely not war-minded. There is a world of difference between the two.

The second innovation at Bridgwater left no doubt in my mind as to its merits. It was shown at the Agricultural Education Stand, and was unquestionably the high spot of the show. Beneath a plough set on high I found a series of experiments, showing just how worn-out pasture land in the West Country has been improved by the plough. The word "has" in that last sentence is the important one. This display did not merely suggest how pasture land might be improved, but showed specific examples of how this has been accomplished.

Every detail of the work was set out both plainly and attractively. Beginning with a square of the worn-out turf, one could walk slowly down the line, and from this condition note its steady progress through an arable break, and finally into either a wheat crop, a potato crop, or a greatly improved sward. The dates of each necessary operation were given, showing when to plough, roll, cultivate, manure, sow with a catch crop, plough again, etc.

This valuable exhibit gained general appreciation from the company present. Every day there was a steady stream of farmers and farm-workers, most of them under forty, not merely looking at it, but carefully taking down in their note-books every bit of data which was so plainly and attractively displayed. In my view that exhibit at Bridgwater will have done more to help the new policy of the plough than ten thousand speeches in its favour. In agricultural matters example is so much more valuable than precept.

XVI

Recently I have been thinking that countryfolk generally are too fond of poking fun at the farm pupil, especially when the lad happens to be an obvious townsman. That at first he may seem very foolish and absurdly awkward to folk who have grown up on a farm I well know, but to suggest that he will never learn his new calling nor do his best to do so is usually both unfair and untrue. I write that because during the past week or so I have come across several cases of farm pupils who, having been invited to an evening's tennis, have replied that they would come gladly, but only if haymaking permitted. Which, I think speaks well for both master and pupil; for the great thing which one must teach and the other must learn is that the farm always comes first. Unless that lesson be learned and appreciated at its proper value, neither technical knowledge nor sufficient capital will serve to make the lad into a farmer.

There is no doubt that as the grain harvest in this country becomes less important, the hay harvest becomes more so. Very certainly haymaking rules the countryman's life more and more each succeeding summer, in spite of the help of so many new inventions. This year I have an entirely horseless haymaking. For some years the only horse job in my hayfield has been the raking, but this year I have put on a wide tractor-drawn rake, which enables my one remaining old pensioner cart-horse to survey our mechanical activities with a placid eye, as he stands in the paddock.

But there is one thing about farming which no farmer should forget, and that is that no matter how many new inventions he uses the purpose of his farming should remain unchanged. Too often in these materialistic days people are apt, in their admiration for the new method, to forget its purpose. Cleverness is all very well, but I am convinced that the many troubles which to-day afflict the world will not be cured by cleverness alone. Personally I should put my money on the people who care, rather than on the people who are merely clever. I said as much to a friend the other day, and he argued that he was clever and he did care, to which I retorted that such was a very rare combination.

Moreover, I am convinced that the countryman's life and work do enable him to arrive at the correct attitude to modern machinery.

For instance, the other evening my hayfield was filled with gadgets any one of which would have amazed our grandfathers. Every implement in it was driven, pulled, or pushed by mechanical power, but one thing remained unchanged—the scent of good hay. That scent should prevent any countryman from losing sight of the purpose of all the clever things he now uses in his haymaking; and that purpose is, of course, just the same as of old, not merely to perform clever tricks, but to make good hay. It is when the countryman forgets the purpose of his machines that one soon sees bad farming and ruined land.

But with all our clever machinery in caddling weather, neither wet nor dry, it is difficult to obtain the necessary scent in the hayfield. Not because of any appreciable amount of rain, but because the weather is just having fun with the farmer. At 7 a.m., while the milkers are at breakfast, he goes up in the field, and decides that conditions are ripe for everybody on the farm to get a move on. By 8.15 he has got his rakes going, and everything in the garden is lovely. So much so that at 10 o'clock he drives his car furiously across country collecting a carrying team. At ten-thirty the car-sweeps make a start, even though his most ancient employee, whom he usually loves but whom at this moment he hates passionately, says, "Maister, it bain't fit. Thee't 'ave 'im afire." At 10.45 the rain comes, just a sharp shower for about ten minutes; so at 11 o'clock he drives his men back to their various jobs, and goes home in a bad temper.

Then the weather takes pity on him. "Dear, dear," its clerk says. "He's really quite cross. I must do something about it." So the sun shines hotly, and a nice breeze springs up. During the farmer's mid-day meal he wonders whether there may not yet be a chance of getting some hay, and immediately it is over he drives up to have a look-see. Really, it has dried wonderfully. There isn't a cloud in the sky. So back he goes to get his rakes busy once more, and to warn everybody that after tea there will be something doing. Meantime he himself and perhaps the groom-gardener give the wakes which were raked in the morning a careful shake and turn. About 5.35 p.m. the sweeps begin once more, and he decides that he is a clever fellow, a man with his eye to the main chance, the sort of farmer who gets hay while others grumble. Yes, if there were more folk like him, farming would need neither subsidies nor tariffs. So he tells himself that by knock-off time he will have stolen a march on his neighbours and the weather.

He tells the world around him that car-sweeps are a slick rig, and decided to give a hand at the foot of the elevator. The men may think him too soft for such work, but he knows that it's not only

brawn that's required, but something upstairs as well. Then up drives his wife in the car. Can he take a personal call from London in ten minutes' time? No, he can't. London can chase itself into the Thames. He's haymaking. You betcha!

His wife drives away, and twenty minutes later down comes the rain again. And that's that. So he detaches a sweep from one of the cars, and drives home in a still worse temper. A half-hour later the sun shines once more, and his wife challenges him to a single at tennis. These women! Well, it will be a relief to hit something, even a tennis-ball. But she beats him six-three.

And then, when he is soaking in a bath, and the soothing effect of the hot water has just begun to soften his misery, London rings up again! Can you beat it? You can't, but take my advice and don't visit your farmer friends in June.

XVII

For some months now in my temporary capacity as one of the Joint Honorary Secretaries of the local Hunt I have learned many things, the two most notable being that running a Hunt is a much bigger job than I had imagined, and that the generosity and forbearance of non-hunting farmers and cottagers are amazing. The ramifications of a Hunt are wide, scarcely any one in a rural district being unaffected by them in some fashion or another. Apart from the obvious business transactions with forage-merchant, flesh-dealer, blacksmith, saddler, tailor, and the like, there are the earth-stoppers, the payment of finding money to keepers, arrangements with all sorts of village folk from boys to old-age pensioners with regard to the trimming of racks, the shutting of gates and gaps, and similar operations. In addition there are poultry claims and claims for definite damage to fences and crops, and it is in connection with these that I have been so astonished at the attitude of the sufferers, for most of them almost apologize for claiming compensation.

Just what the correct valuation of poultry claims for birds killed by marauding foxes should be I do not know, being a very tyro secretary. It is obvious that in many cases the poultry would have been killed by foxes even if there were no hunt in existence in the district, and that a Hunt Secretary's job is to pay, not necessarily the full value of the birds killed, but a generous valuation for the Hunt's share of the responsibility for that loss. Up to date my colleague's

and my valuation of this has generally been accepted as a fair one, not, I think, because we are experts at the job, but because we are both farmers who by living and working in the district have learned how to estimate correctly, not only the circumstances of the loss, but also the character of the claimant. But when a cottager loses poultry through their being killed by a lost hound I have no hesitation in apologizing to the sufferer and paying the full value of the birds. The latter is a legal liability, and the former in my view is a courtesy which is justly due.

Consequently during the past winter I have extended my acquaintance considerably throughout the neighbourhood, and I dare to think made many new friends. Since actual hunting finished a month or two back I have continued with what the Master describes as "summer hunting," that is to say, with keeping one's hunting friendships green whenever possible, and this morning I had a good run, or rather a long chat, with an old friend. I met him in an ox-drove on the top of a down ridge along which I was coaxing my car, so I stopped, and got out in order to pass the time of day and discuss the affairs of the district. We applauded the weather, damned Hitler, had a word or two about conscription, and then he gave me his considered opinion of A.R.P. as it is carried on in rural Wessex.

"Zee thic zmatter?" he asked, pointing with his stick to the brown smudge of some trenches in a green pasture on the outskirts of his village. I nodded.

"Lot o' voolery," he snorted. "'Coorse, I doan't goo fur to zay as up Lunnon an' in big towns that trenches bain't needed, cause they be. But yerabouts they bain't. There bain't enough people. Back along when thic caper were on they asked I ef I were gwaine to 'elp dig, 'an I telled 'em as I'd dug all the trenches I were gwaine to, and telled they to let good ground alone."

"Still, even village people like to feel safe," I suggested.

"Zafe! Look at yer. Ef wold Hitler do come awver yer wi' 'is aeryoplanes, he bain't zet on bombin' Sedgebury Wallop. An' when 'ee do come wi' 'em I be gwaine to bide at whoam or in pub an' take me chance. Zides, ef the bombs wur comin' thick there's plenty o' ditches an' zunk lanes about fur all o' we. An' I do know zummat about war an' zich-like. What's think? I were 'ounded in South Africa, blowed up in Vrance, an' submarooned in a troopship. Take it all roun', I 'ad a gutful, as you mid zay. But I tell 'ee, none o' the wold sojers like I didn't mess wi' trench diggin' like thiccy last fall. 'Twer they tother-me wot done it all. Ho, ho. Like scratchin' badgers they was."

I murmured something to the effect that he mustn't be quite so scornful of civilians who had not shared his military experiences, and mentioned that A.R.P. had given the villages a new lease of community life.

"Ay! It 'ave that. Brought volk together proper. But will 'ee tell I one thing, maister? Why is that the main o' the volk wot do take the leadin' part in thease yer A.R.P. caper in the villages be zort o' 'alf-zkim volk, thee's know, not wuth more'n vive bob a wik at anythin' zensible?"

"I shan't have that," I protested, and instanced the hard work performed by various local people, neither of whom could by any manner of means warrant his designation of "half-skin."

"Ay, I'll gie 'ee volk like that," he said. "They be in responsible positions, an' got to carry out the reggylations. Does it well, too, most on 'em. But there's two zarts o' volk wot be main busy wuth this yer A.R.P., wot bain't wuth vindin'."

"Such as?" I asked, as he stopped to tap out his pipe.

"Vust there be the volk as ain't never managed to git 'old o' no 'thority any other road. Like Mrs. Major Blank. O' coorse, she'm a super bitch."

The description of the lady was so apt that I laughed aloud, and so did he. I handed over my pouch, and he resumed his commentary.

"Thellak! You knows 'ow 'tis wi' 'er, zame as most volk. We've a kep' 'er off the Parish Council, an' off the Rural District, the Vicar won't wear 'er, neet the 'Oomen's Institute, an' they'll put up wi' most things. But thease yer A.R.P. 'ave bin a godsend to 'er. She zeed 'er chance, an' took it wi' both 'ands. An' there's a zight like 'er. This Mrs. Dash. She'm vair crazy about National Service. But she ain't niver done 'er proper national service, an' cooked decent meals fur 'er 'usband. But now she kin vind time to run about wi' gas masks, an' strut droo the village in trousers an' gum boots. A proper zight in thic get up she be."

Here he grinned at the remembrance, and handed me back my pouch, so I inquired concerning his second class of A.R.P. workers.

"The second lot be a zight better than the fust," he opined, puffing vigorously at his pipe. "They be the li'l volk, wot 'ave niver 'ad no chance o' bein' in the public eye, an' gittin' their names in the papers. Thease A.R.P. be meat an' drink to 'em. But, lor bless 'ee, ef zo be as you wur in an 'ole they'd be the last volk as you'd call on to 'elp 'ee out. Thee's know, they does their li'l job, wotever it mid be, but they jist ain't got it, neether upstairs neet in their 'ands. But they do

jist about enjoy the paradin' an' dressin' up. It gies 'em a chance to be big fur once."

We discussed the matter further for a few minutes, and then, as he refused a lift down to his village, I went my way. Incidentally, I would bet that on his way home through the gorse on the down a rabbit or two found its way into his capacious pockets.

But this evening I have been thinking about his criticisms of his neighbours and their A.R.P. activities. With those concerning the first class, the super bitches, I am in entire agreement, but I am convinced that he is a trifle too hard on the second. There is no doubt that A.R.P., even while it may not be so necessary in a west-country village as in a south-east town, has revived communal effort in the country-side which is all to the good. Moreover, the lives of many people are drab. Why should they be blamed for enjoying the temporary importance and brief authority which their A.R.P. work gives them? Everybody enjoys being important, and everybody, little or much, yearns for an opportunity to dramatize himself or herself. Those who attain either of these satisfactions through A.R.P. are certainly earning them by giving up their scanty leisure to this work. Even so, my old friend's conversation this morning does show how keenly every activity of countryfolk is noticed and criticized by their neighbours. It is, perhaps, a fairly easy thing to be a great man in town, but how difficult is it to attain that eminence in the country-side!

XVIII

How fashions change in farming opinion! A few years ago any one who pointed out the paramount importance of Britain's grass crop was either scorned, sneered at, or openly reviled as a traitor. I know, because I experienced all three in good measure. However, I continued to side with a small and very unpopular minority of people, who argued that grass was a crop admirably suited to our temperate moist climate, that underneath its sod was the safest place to store fertility against time of need, and that in this country grain-growing during peace should be regarded not as our farming's main business but as a by-product of animal husbandry, or rather of grass. It is indeed pleasant to find that the people who once ridiculed such a doctrine are now preaching it either as their own discovery, or else with the fervour which the latest convert to any doctrine almost invariably displays.

Scarcely a week goes by without one reading of a GRASS CONFERENCE in some county or another. I have attended several, and the

enthusiasm for grassland improvement is such that I can liken it only to a fever. I have a vague recollection of hay-box cookery; my increasing weight tends to make far too many friends suggest that I should adopt the hay diet; and unfortunately for me I have been a sufferer from hay fever all my life at this time of year. Now, fortunately for me, for all British farmers, and for all British townfolk, everybody connected with farming in this country seems to be suffering from hay fever. And they've got it bad.

However, this is not the usual kind of hay fever which brings me running eyes and continual sneezing, but that peculiar brand of this malady with which an increasing number of people are trying to infect everybody, and seemingly succeeding. My friend, Mr. W. D. Hay, the Principal of the Cannington Farm Institute in Somerset, is a definite "carrier." Another friend, Professor Sir R. G. Stapledon, was, of course, born with this disease. Thanks be, we now have a Minister of Agriculture, Sir Reginald Dorman Smith, who, instead of sneering at grass according to ancient custom, dared to sneeze occasionally in their company. And, from what I have seen recently, a rapidly increasing number of farming-folk are following suit.

The great thing about this epidemic is that the recent official backing of a grassland agricultural policy designed to increase soil fertility seems at last to have infused into our farming one very valuable thing which has been sadly lacking for so many years—enthusiasm. In backing the fertility horse, in helping the British farmer to get a living by improving his land rather than by robbing it, in trying to make good farming a better business proposition than bad farming, the Minister of Agriculture has restored to British farmers a proper pride in their calling.

This was most necessary. You can give a man a black eye, and he will forgive you. You can injure his pocket, and he will forgive you. But if you hurt a man's pride, that hurt will rankle ever afterwards, and he will never forgive you. For the first time since 1921 British farming shows signs of vigorous life, enthusiasm, proper pride—call it what you will. I prefer to call it HAY FEVER. May it continue unabated long after this year's haymaking is finished.

Anyway, now that landlord, farmers, farm-workers, agricultural experts, research workers, and politicians are holding grass conferences up and down the country, there is a good chance that British farming land will be able to grow some decent crops of wheat. Once more, it is the oblique approach that does it.

XIX

To-day in rural England there are lots of things which are not pleasant to look upon. I noticed one the other evening, and subsequently sought information from an old countryman on whom I called.

"Tell me something, Bill. What's the matter with Blank?"—a village in the neighbourhood through which I had driven that evening.

"Now jist what be you getting at?" retorted the cautious countryman.

"Well, it's dropping to bits. Every time I drive through it, a little more seems to have mouldered into decay."

"Ay, that's true enough, an' you knows why. When the big estate wur selled they come from all parts eager to buy. 'Twer split up, an' the new folks sit pretty fur a while. Then, when the cat jumped tother way they wur done. They didn' know enough 'ow to farm agen bad times. They didn't 'ave enough money to stand 'em, neet to git out an' stomach their loss. So they bides put, lettin' things git wuss an' wuss every year. Which is bad for they, bad for everybody, an' damn bad fur the land. But there 'tis, an' neether we nor they can alter it."

XX

Once again the camping season has arrived, and the occasional campeer is learning how to deal with it. The word "campeer," if there is such a word, is meant to refer to the person camped on as distinguished from the person who does the camping. Obviously in most cases the campeer will be a farmer of sorts. I have prefixed the adjective "occasional" in order to make it clear that I am not referring to the trials and troubles of the person, farmer or otherwise, who has taken up the profession of "campeer" as his main business in life.

For instance, where a farmer can let out his land fairly regularly at the rate of five caravans per acre at a shilling a day per caravan from, say, the beginning of June, until the end of September, he must welcome this new source of income, and realize that it will be well worth his while to cater for these nomadic paying-guests. But the majority of campers do not want to camp in a small field in company with dozens of other caravans, where the butcher, the baker, and the milkman call regularly for orders. They want to camp on a farm where they will be the only campers, and so most farmers are only occasional "campeers."

Now when a farmer does adopt this role the camper should realise that no sum of money can represent the value of what he can, and in most cases will, obtain from a one-night camp. It is absurd to talk about the cost of production, or of the money value of the damage done to the farm or the farmer by the camper. Neither of these things comes in this question at all. The great point is the invasion of privacy which the occasional "campee" suffers. No money can compensate for that, and good manners and courtesy on the part of the camper are the only currency which can transact this business satisfactorily. The shilling which he pays is merely a token payment which retains the right of refusal to the "campee." Without that token payment, many campers would camp without even asking permission.

Taking it by and large the occasional camper on any farm is and must be a damn nuisance to the farmer. Usually he arrives in the evening, when the farmer and his men have just knocked off after a long day's work in the open air. He inquires at the farm-house whether he may camp, and if so, just where? With a sigh the farmer leaves his supper and goes out to deal with him; for in most cases it is useless simply to give directions and return to one's supper. Rural directions mean very little to the town camper, and so someone must go with him to the camping sight. If a man is sent this will cost the farmer one hour's overtime—at least ninepence—which rather discounts the camper's shilling. So usually the farmer goes. He can, of course, ride up with the camper and walk back. But he is tired, and so he gets out his own car and leads the way. Of course, no farmer should have a car, but somehow or other most of them have got one.

Then, more often than not, when the farmer has helped the camper to trig up his caravan on a nice level place, he is asked whether he will sell his uninvited visitor something—an old bag for the dog's bed, some drinking water, or a pint of milk. These commodities are worth very little, but by now they are all nearly a mile away, and, to repeat, the farmer is tired. What he ought to reply is, "I'm tired. If I go down to the farm and bring you back these things, the water will cost you five shillings a gallon, the milk half a crown a pint, and the bag for your dog a guinea. But if you fetch them yourself I'll pay you a guinea for being so obliging." But, as long as the camper asks nicely and does not think the farmer a profiteer for charging him a shilling for the site, usually the farmer meekly fetches him what he needs and merely charges threepence for the pint of milk.

But let us put the boot on the other foot. Supposing I ring a townsman's front door bell at eight o'clock on a summer evening, and

ask if I can sleep in his back yard, and also whether he will go round to the nearest pub and fetch me a pint of beer. What then? Would that townsman feel adequately paid at the rate of a shilling a time?

The chief thing for the camper to remember is that he is not a component part of the complicated machine which constitutes England's country-side; and that in effect he is usually a piece of grit in the mechanism. Take the question of bathing and of dogs. Where there is a river running through the farm, quite naturally the camper wants to bathe. Surely to do that cannot harm the farmer? After all, the average bather drinks but a small quantity of water. But the point is that some one is paying good money to fish that stream, and therefore does not want to find any one bathing in it. The fisherman is paying adequately for his footing in the country-side; the occasional camper is not doing and cannot do this. The same argument applies to the camper's little dog which has such a glorious time hunting the hedgerows where the shooting tenant's partridges are nesting.

But enough of this niggardly carping spirit on the part of the countryman—there are two sides to every question. Modern invention and transport have decreed that our lovely country-side is no longer the prerogative of the favoured few who live and work in it. The internal combustion engine has made it free to all who appreciate its charms. Moreover, it is greatly to the countryman's interest that his town cousins should visit the country-side, and so get to know something of its work and wealth and problems; for the prosperity of British farming lies almost entirely in the hands of the town voter. How can the town-dweller play a rightful part in its government unless he makes a more intimate acquaintance with the country-side, and unless he or she is assured of a cheerful welcome from the farming community? There are ill-mannered campers I know; and I will confess that there are ill-mannered farmers also. But there are many folk in both classes who are neither ill-mannered nor narrow-minded. The well-being of both country-side and town requires that these people shall meet and make friends in the most glorious setting in all God's world—rural England in sunny summer-time.

There is no reason at all why the occasional camper cannot camp on any farm without annoying the "campee" one little bit. The proper method is not an expensive one, but possibly the best way to explain it will be to draw up a detailed balance of one night's camp of this character. Here it is:

<i>Debit</i>	£	s.	d.	<i>Credit</i>	£	s.	d.
To one night's camp	0	1	0	By payment for site	0	1	0
To two gallons of water, delivered	0	10	0	By payment for milk	0	0	3
To one pint of milk, delivered	0	2	6	By allowance for camper's good manners, courtesy, and obvious realiza- tion that he is receiv- ing a favour and not conferring one	10	1	3
To one old bag for dog, delivered	1	1	0				
To disturbing tired farmer at his supper	5	5	0				
To allowing dog to have such fun	3	3	0				
	<hr/> £10 2 6				<hr/> £10 2 6		

I defy any one to balance the account of the occasional camper and campee in any other way.

XXI

The most terrible thing which befalls any fisherman is to be accosted by a friend, and asked to demonstrate his skill. You know the sort of thing. "Well, now I'm here let me see you catch one. I've often watched people fishing, but I've never seen anybody catch a fish." But this morning I had a real triumph. A few days earlier I had gathered up a nephew from his school, and he has been staying here for a few days until his parents return from abroad. Like the majority of boys he was very interested in anything mechanical on the farm, for instance, the gyro-tiller fascinated him. At the moment this tool is working on a neighbouring farm, and not only is my nephew interested in this tool, but scores of other people, from crying babies whose parents live near the scene of action to farmers and townsfolk from a distance. The noise of the implement advertises its presence and so brings many visitors to the farm, for on a still day one can hear its steady pounding for several miles. It is, I think, its ruthless power which fascinates people. Bushes, stones, rabbits--nothing can stop it. Slowly but surely it forges along, its twisting tails stirring everything in its wake for a depth of fifteen inches.

With such an interesting mechanical gadget on show it was only to be expected that a modern boy such as my nephew would be very scornful of an uncle who seemed to go fishing every evening and come back home with an empty basket, yet surprisingly happy and satisfied

with this method of spending his leisure. Which last was perfectly true. I had been having great fun, but no luck. I had hooked two or three fish and lost them, and several more had outwitted me completely. One especially. He lay on a bank, in such an awkward place that the only way to get a fly near him was to climb half-way up a pollarded willow, lie along its trunk, and switch the fly sideways under some overhanging branches. In all I must have fished for that blighter for three or four hours, never once getting him to come to me, and losing several flies in the branches overhead; but, as I am a fisherman of great experience albeit of indifferent skill, not losing my temper.

All of which I explained to my youthful critic, adding that as the water-keeper had told me that there was an early morning rise, I proposed to capture that wily fish before breakfast. Rather scornfully he consented to come with me, and this morning the early departure of my car rather astonished the natives. And at eight-five a.m. that fish came up first toss, much to my surprise and to the great astonishment of my companion, who had carefully examined the mechanism of the telescopic net which he carried without any faith that he might be required to use it as its makers intended.

After two or three dashes up and down the pool, one beautiful leap out of the water, and occasional bursts of delightful music from the reel, I managed to scramble down from my perch, and steer that fish over the waiting net. Half an hour later the rain came down, and two very satisfied fishermen returned home to breakfast. Since then the younger has been thinking that there is something in fly-fishing after all, and the elder has been going about his work thinking that for once middle-age is one up on youth.

XXII

Whilst walking round the Royal Academy the other afternoon I was suddenly reminded of my native Wilts. I found myself facing the portrait of E. S. Beaven, Esq., LL.D., by W. G. de Glehn, R.A.; and the sight of his genial countenance took me back to a memorable day in late July which I spent in his barley nursery at Warminster some three years before. Dr. Beaven has been rightly named the father of countless sturdy John Barleycorns, for his valuable work for British farming has consisted of producing new varieties of barley to suit the ever-changing taste of brewers, farmers, and the British climate.

I grew up as a lad with Chevalier barley, and at that date nearly everybody sowed that variety. Its great fault was the weakness of its straw, and for many years now it has been replaced by the stiffer-

strawed Archer varieties. This I knew, but not until I visited Warminster did I learn what a large share of the credit for this improvement belongs to Dr. Beaven, or that millions of acres of barley have been grown in this country during recent years from two cultures which originated in that little field just off the Warminster main street.

I am quite certain that many other men have made more money than Dr. Beaven out of agricultural work over the long period during which he has been engaged in this barley business, but I doubt whether any man can have achieved greater success or satisfaction. In human life, and especially in farming life, money isn't everything, although in many cases it is the outward and visible sign of human achievement. If Dr. Beaven has managed to make a fortune from his research work, no one will say that it was not well earned. But even if he has not done so, the sight of those barley crops standing up so well to bad weather must give him great personal satisfaction. In every county in the country at this time of year he can find his signature written in standing barley; a signature which will stand and of which he will never be ashamed. That sort of thing cannot be bought with money.

I do not think that he has ever received fitting national recognition, not only for the value of his work, but for the fact that he has performed it single-handed, and at his own risk. One only can imagine the many disappointments he must have borne; the number of times when the results of some tedious and expensive experiment has proved valueless; and the number of times he must have said, "Well, that cat won't jump. I must try to find another that will."

For forty years and more he has plodded steadfastly on in that little Wiltshire field, without, as far as I know, any State aid or national recognition. It is because such sterling individualism makes me feel so humble that I have tried to express my admiration for a man who has done things for farming; being very conscious of the inferiority of the man who merely writes about them.

May I also compliment him on discovering something else—the secret of perpetual youth. In spite of its many trials and disappointments, I cannot think that his research work can have been very wearing to either mind or body, for he looks so very young. So young that I have been hunting for a quotation to pay him a fitting and respectful compliment. A slight alteration to one of Lewis Carroll's rhymes almost does justice:

"You are old, Father Beaven," the young man said,

"And your hair has become very white;

And yet you incessantly give us good seed—

At your age, reverend sir, this is right "

But perhaps that is a trifle too flippant. What a pity Shakespeare and Dr. Beaven never met, for then the bard would have written:

Age cannot wither, nor custom stale
His infinite variety.

Without fear of contradiction I here state that British farmers hope to be able to use those two lines with reference to Dr. Beaven for many years to come.

XXIII

Everywhere the country-side is turning to harvest. Wheat achieves its golden-brown glory; oats turn a lovely ash-blonde; the barley field becomes a square of pale yellow on the hill-side; while the clover ripens from scarlet to burnt sienna. In the village gardens the ramblers boast a ragged glory; the dahlias are in bloom; and the apples show bravely after their christening on St. Swithin's day. When the breeze rustles the elms a few leaves flutter down, a sure sign that autumn is only just round the corner. Each evening the young ducks career over the meadows in wedge-shaped formation, delighting in their recently accomplished proficiency in flying. As one walks over the fields the young partridges first run away from the approaching danger, and then fly swiftly in a covey with their wily parents. Rabbits, the curse of English farming, show far too numerous on the down slopes, while the young starlings strut and chatter in crowd across the arable and pasture. Even the doings of countryfolk tell the date quite plainly. Each morning sees the hounds padding along the lanes at exercise, a sure sign that cubbing is close at hand. In one field an elevator rattles against a hayrick; in another the binder chatters its way around a square of winter oats; in yet another the huge combine-harvester sails slowly and majestically round a grain field.

But the plainest print in the country calendar just now is the recent increase in the village population: for the schools have broken up, and girls and boys seem to be everywhere. They throng the bathing-pool in the water-meadows; shy lads call on farmers to ask permission to wait for marauding pigeons in the clump by the wheat field; and not so shy damsels demand that every pony in the district shall discover that life during August, in spite of lumps of sugar, is a very real and earnest business. For now is the season of the village flower show, a function which caters for everybody, old and young, rich and poor, male and female. What preparations are made for it, in cottage and castle, in field and stable, in drawing-rooms and kitchens! Vegetables

are washed, and sometimes, I am convinced, polished. Cart-horses are groomed to a fine gloss, and decked with ribbons and brasses. Horses and ponies of every imaginable age, size, and shape are practised up and down and round and round, until both they and their riders are tired and sometimes a trifle dizzy. Home-made wine is tasted by rural experts in order to be sure that the best bottle is shown; collections of wild and garden flowers are carefully arranged; and cakes are baked for competition purposes in hall, rectory, and cottage.

"And all for a twopenny-halfpenny village flower show!" the uninitiated may exclaim. "It isn't worth the fuss!" To such criticism there can only be one reply, "Come with me to a village flower show and see for yourself."

Now where shall we go? Not to a big village, which modern progress is fast transforming into a bad imitation of the town, but to a little hamlet, at least ten miles from what the townsman calls civilization. There are still hundreds of these, thanks be, but to-day, one will serve, the village of Sedgebury Wallop, which is to be found in any county you care to choose. Well, here we are town and country, all of us in a flat green pasture, which is surrounded by tall trees. In the middle is the big ring for the mounted gymkhana, and around it are parked hundreds of cars, for it is the motor-car which has revived and enlarged the village flower show during recent years. The flower tent is hot, much too hot for comfort, but not too hot for interest. Here the squire's garden competes with the cottager's, and it is surprising how often the latter's wins. Sometimes there are a few grouses at the awards, but, again thanks to the car, there are fewer than of yore, for the judges now come from a distance. But everybody present is a qualified judge, having earned his or her degree in the university of England's country-side, a fact which enables one to overhear such remarks as, "Ees, I beat Bill Brewer fur spuds, but nobody cain't touch 'im for onions. Ye zee, workin' fur the butcher, 'ee kin git blood." A gruesome thought perhaps, but an undeniable advantage to Bill.

To take the taste away, let us sample the wine. Well-made and matured parsnip wine takes some beating, but it will be unwise to drink too deeply this hot weather, for there is "a tarblish kick" to it. But one thing we can do, we can take home a bottle of mead. Of course, to sell mead without a licence is illegal. Everybody present knows that, but we are all friends in this tent, and there is always a *modus vivendi* in rural matters. Besides, the village bobby is outside watching the jumping.

Now for some fresh air. A hunt secretary and a retired farmer are judging the cart-horses, as about fifty of them parade round the big

ring. A difficult task, but there are lots of prizes and numerous classes to give every one a show, and an R.S.P.C.A. medal for every competitor. "No, Zilas Taunton didn't win the champion cup for the third time running, an' zo be able to kip 'im. But I 'low, zno, as 'twere a close fit 'tween 'ee an' Mark Dumper." Which leaves the cup still open next year, and thus pleases everybody except perhaps Silas.

But who said that the horse was a back number? Just look at the entries for the jumping! In the open class famous horses from a distance, which have won at Olympia, take the honours; but there is a loud cheer when a local farmer, whose methods seem to be based on the "over, under, or through" principle, gets third place. The handy hunter gives everybody a chance, for here the value of the mount counts far less than its handiness. It is the slip rail which decides this competition, and there is much amusement when the winner of a jumping class refuses to hop over a two-foot rail in hand, despite the coaxings of its rider standing on the far side. But everybody is pleased when a little girl who has evidently schooled her mount carefully for this business, canters slowly home an easy winner on a twenty-year-old pony.

In fact, here there is something for everybody. The small daughter of a duke on a blood pony fights out the final of the children's musical chairs on terms of absolute equality with the child of the small holder, whose fat cob was hauling the milk-float early this morning. The local hounds show their paces as they follow the huntsman's pink coat around the ring, while the whip reminds any straggler that this is an occasion which demands tip-top behaviour. The keepers compete with their employers at the clay pigeons, with such success that the latter begin to realize that some of the rabbit cartridges must have been used in private practice.

When the competitions are finished and the sun is sinking behind the western ridge of down, the roundabout starts up, and the swinging-boats begin to scythe the twilight, the music of the former telling the village band that their task is done, and that perhaps some beer will prove a fitting finale. In due time night calls it a day, half a moon hangs like a slice of cheese in a velvet sky, and the company go their several ways—on foot, on horseback, in cars, on cycles, or by charabanc. That extra pint causes the winning carter to sing mournfully as he rides home side-saddle on his huge Shire steed, the tinkling brasses making a fitting accompaniment.

So ends the village flower show, one of the few remaining bits of the real England. The march of progress has changed it in many ways, but, thank goodness, the old flavour lasts.

XXIV

It is not often that townsfolk pay the British farmer compliments, but last week a Londoner and his wife both told me that they were amazed at the cheapness of fresh English farm produce. What made this the more remarkable was that they were not wealthy people by any means; yet they admitted that this season they had bought market-garden produce at a price which seemed to them ridiculously low.

"Five pounds of new potatoes for a bob, guvna. Lumme, I should want that just to dig 'em. And peas at a price which couldn' 'ave paid for picken'."

So I thanked them, and told them that all British farmers and farm-workers wanted in return for their produce was a wage for their work in producing it which was comparable with the remuneration for work in towns. And I am convinced that the more we can get our farming treated in politics on all fours with town industries the more easy it will be to justify a vigorous agricultural policy to the town voter.

XXV

The other day I performed the pleasant task of driving a Press photographer around the country-side in order to provide him with facilities for taking photographs of farming operations and the men who performed them. Two pleasing features of that journey would seem to be worth mentioning. The first dealt with my companion's impressions of the farm-workers whom we met.

"I've never met such a jolly lot of people," he said. "Where are the down-trodden, underpaid, sweated farm-hands one hears so much about? All these folk seem to be bubbling over with content."

Well, where are they? I don't know, and so I told him. I also added, "And good luck to 'em!"

The other seems to provide yet another illustration that the country-man is not exactly slow in the uptake. My companion asked one man how large was the silver cup which he had won for the best cultivated garden in the district.

"'Olds a 'alf a gallon an' a 'alf-pint," came the reply from a ruddy face, which was blessed with merry twinkling eyes.

What could the poor townsman do but provide the wherewithal to fill the said cup to the brim?

XXVI

Every day in every way we are continually being reminded of the despoiling of the country-side, and of the urgent need to preserve it unspoilt for the comfort of those who come after us. Some want the whole country-side thrown open to the hiker, motorist, and holiday-maker; others want national parks; while others ask for more stringent laws against litter louts and trespassers. More and more I am coming to the conclusion that the only way to preserve our country-side is to make our towns more attractive. At the moment, if our population were spread evenly over this island, there would be more than five hundred persons to every square mile. In fact, it is only because eight out of every ten people live in towns that there is any country-side at all.

So, instead of grouching about the erection of cinemas, dog-racing tracks, and other modern town amusements, every true countryman should egg on his town friends and acquaintances to provide more and more town amusements. Let cinemas, lidos, theatres, racing tracks, tennis courts, cricket grounds, and every other town amenity be multiplied exceedingly, so that the town will be so blooming attractive that no one will desire to leave it. At the moment the average town is merely an industrial camp: it may be a fit place to work in, but it is not a fit place to live in. Witness the increasing desire amongst town-folk to work in town but to live out of it. No matter what laws are passed concerning the country-side, that same country-side will continue to dwindle and to be shabbied as long as the towns remain in their present unattractive state. In other words, if we improve the town we shall automatically preserve the country-side.

XXVII

Since time out of mind townsfolk have flocked to the seaside during the month of August, to such an extent that many years ago *Punch* depicted the crowded holiday scene on the sands with a caption something like this: "England has a large maritime population, of which she is justly proud." But such cynicism missed fire completely, and each succeeding year saw that maritime population grow in both size and enjoyment, despite the pains it suffered from the too-drastic exposure of its pallid nudity to the August sunshine.

But during recent years another type of holiday-maker has come into being in large and rapidly increasing numbers, townsfolk who

decide to spend their August leisure in exploring the English countryside. The more cynical assert that it is the sight of such a large quantity of red and blistered humanity at the seaside which has driven these folk inland. Other reasons put forward are the distaste for crowds, the desire for more natural surroundings, and an appreciation of the varied beauty of the rural scene. All these have some bearing on this comparatively recent change of habit, but the real attraction in the country-side is the agriculture of the particular district.

One marvellous thing about our home farming is the quiet and efficient way in which it has taken full advantage of modern science and invention. Without any publicity or ballyhoo it has pressed into the service of England's land every new machine as soon as it became practicable so to do, to such an extent that to-day English farming is far more mechanized than is Canadian. And how charmingly this change has been made, and how fittingly is the new mixed with the old. Tucked away amongst the cobwebbed, hand-hewn, oaken rafters of an old thatched shed may be found a forgotten flail of ancient days, while underneath the latest combine-harvester spends its annual leisure. On the most mechanized of farms that awkward piked corner of a field is often sown by the lovely swinging hands of age, and to-day when the young sparrows line the sun-drenched hedgerows on either side of it those same hands reap the crop with an ancient tool, making a music which shames the clatter of the modern binder, "Swish—swish—swish."

It is to be hoped that this increasing fashion for country holidays will lead townsfolk to ask themselves just what or who is responsible for the really astonishing position of farming in this country to-day, and that each succeeding August will bring them nearer the right answer. The sentimentalist will give this as a change of heart on the part of townsfolk, which has permitted the passing of much charitable legislation; the theorist and politician as the result of their clever planning, which has forced the fumbling farmer to be more businesslike; the scientist and inventor as the result of their discoveries; and the salaried technical expert as the beneficial effect of his activities.

None of these has any great bearing on the matter. With or without legislation, marketing boards, modern implements, and scientific research, our home farming would have carried on through both good times and bad, for the same reason which has enabled it to keep going in spite of the existence of all these so-called aids. Which is that it is run by individualists for their own ends, and by that curious phenomenon, individualists who never have and never will farm to ruin the land of their own country.

Let no one make any mistake about this point. The present position of English farming depends almost entirely upon the initiative, knowledge, acumen, and hard work of farmers, large and small. Any aid given by recent legislation has been more than discounted by the tariff legislation directed against farming; and as yet any system of voluntary co-operation or any State-aided compulsory co-operation in the form of marketing boards has proved only moderately successful. To-day the trend of legislation of all kinds and the full weight of popular opinion bear directly against the individualist who runs a business for profit, and yet it is that man to-day who supports the English countryside; for the success of every farming enterprise, large or small, depends largely upon one individual.

He provides the free playground for the masses, and the expensive one for the classes. To him should be given the credit for the beauty of the countryside; for, while Nature weaves the fabric which clothes the rural scene, farming designs the pattern of that patchwork quilt of many colours. In both employment and the money value of its annual output his business ranks fourth in the whole country, and has this added merit, that it produces national income and preserves national capital and national beauty: for not yet have his methods impoverished the soil and ruined the land for those who come after him.

The wonder of English farming has become familiar to many town-folk during recent years. It is to be hoped that this August a few of them will discover that shameless man who is responsible for it, the English farmer who commits that awful crime of farming for profit.

Yet, when I study the history of British farming I cannot help coming to the rather depressing conclusion that during the past hundred years or so the occasional periods of agricultural prosperity have always coincided with periods of national peril, either of war or of famine. Apparently, only when it is in a blue funk, does the British nation permit its farming to flourish and prosper. During times of peace and plenty we neglect our country-side. Then, when trouble comes, we turn to it for help. This it grants in good measure, but, the moment the danger is past instead of being grateful, we proceed to neglect our saviour most shamefully.

Now at long last the tic of common funk seems once again to be uniting the interests of town and country. An adequate defence force and air raid precautions are necessary in these uncertain days; but what is the good of being saved alive from enemy attack only to perish miserably from starvation? Dividend warrants and treasury notes will make poor eating compared with that which could be and should be found in the well-stocked larder of a well-farmed Britain.

XXVIII

I wish some of the people in high places would listen to truly rural conversation, and thus obtain the countryman's comments and criticisms of their actions at first hand. Then they would realize that the farming community of Britain have not one ounce of trust in any politician or government.

For instance, the other evening in a country pub I listened to a general conversation on the probabilities of war between Britain and Germany. The non-farming half of the company agreed that there would be no war in the near future, but the farming half thought exactly opposite. One old soldier old-age pensioner farm labourer voiced their views in this fashion.

"Coorse there'll be a war. Stands to reason. They be worritin' about farmin' once agen, bain't 'em? Worritin' fur the vust time fur twenty year. Thee mark my words—when pollytishuns do talk about doin' zummatt fur farmin', they'm scared, an' scared bad."

"Rubbish, Aaron," replied the village baker, who was the accepted leader of the peace-in-our-time party. "You old soldiers are always croaking war!"

"Tain't rubbish," argued Aaron, "an' wot's moor. I ain't said it cause I bin a sojer. I says it cause I gits me livin' from farmin'. Look at yer. They pollytishuns up to Lunnnon bain't jist talkin' about doin' zummatt fur farmin', they've ha' done zummatt a'ready. Two poun' a yacre fur ploughin' up pasture to be paid in cash. That be not only a bloody miracle—that be the law. Thic law wur passed by funk fur to buy zafety, an' fur no other reason. Ef zo be there wur no danger o' war, ketch they pollytishuns spendin' money on farmin'."

Generally speaking, that seems to be the opinion of the farming community to-day. The new interest that parliament is taking in farming is a sure sign to the farmer that war is in the offing. In thinking like that he is merely basing his opinion on the lessons of past history, which tell him very plainly that the British nation has always based the short periods of farming prosperity on beastly things like war and famine.

Well, supposing the farmer is right in his guess, and war comes in the near future? Will this mean that history will repeat itself in another short period of farming prosperity to be followed by yet another period of peace and farming betrayal? I would lay two to one on the latter, but the same odds against the former.

What I mean is that while another world war would bring some measure of financial prosperity to farming, I do not think that it would

mean . . . of the . . . pr . . . period.
 In the first place taxation . . . devised to . . . of thing;
 and in the second, not only prices but actual . . . operations will be
 strictly controlled in the national interest.

Already the subsidy payment for ploughing grassland shows which way that war-time control will go. One ton of home-produced food will be worth two, perhaps five, maybe fifty, tons of overseas produce; and so, when this war comes and for the first time in history, the priceless value of Britain's pastures will be realized by Britain's towns and town politicians. The plough will tap the wealth of fertility that now lies beneath the turf, and then nature and the farmer's skill combined will transmute that good fertility into much-needed food for hungry people.

Money considerations apart, it will not be very pleasing to many British farmers to be compelled to break their cherished pastures, to sterilize the value of their costly water supplies, to scrap their flocks and herds, and to see the carefully planned way of farming that saved them and their land during a long period of national neglect scrapped in order to save the fools who were responsible for that neglect. But all these things will be done by British farmers when the time comes, because this next war will be an all-in party, in which no sectional interest will be permitted to hold sway. These unpleasant things will be done all the more willingly, too, because the average farmer will realize his war-time advantage over most people.

This was brought home to me this morning as I watched a convoy of troops pass by the farm as aeroplanes circled in the blue sky overhead. When the clattering ceased I watched the old dairyman toddling a heifer and a newly-born calf down the lane in the wake of the convoy. I turned about and noticed my tractor and plough moving on the hill-side. I turned again and saw the seed merchant's lorry pull up at the barn with some winter oats that I hope to sow in a day or two. And suddenly I realized the great difference between the farmer's part in war and that of the soldier, sailor, airman, or munition worker.

They will fight with the weapons of death: the farmer will fight with the weapons of life. Both will be important, perhaps equally so; but there is no doubt which is the more wholesome type.

Here is another thought that came to me. Some day, perhaps not very far distant, British people may be fighting with lethal weapons for the land of their own country. When that time comes British farmers must see to it that every field in this island blazons in living green the vigour and defiance of a land fighting for its people.

THE END

